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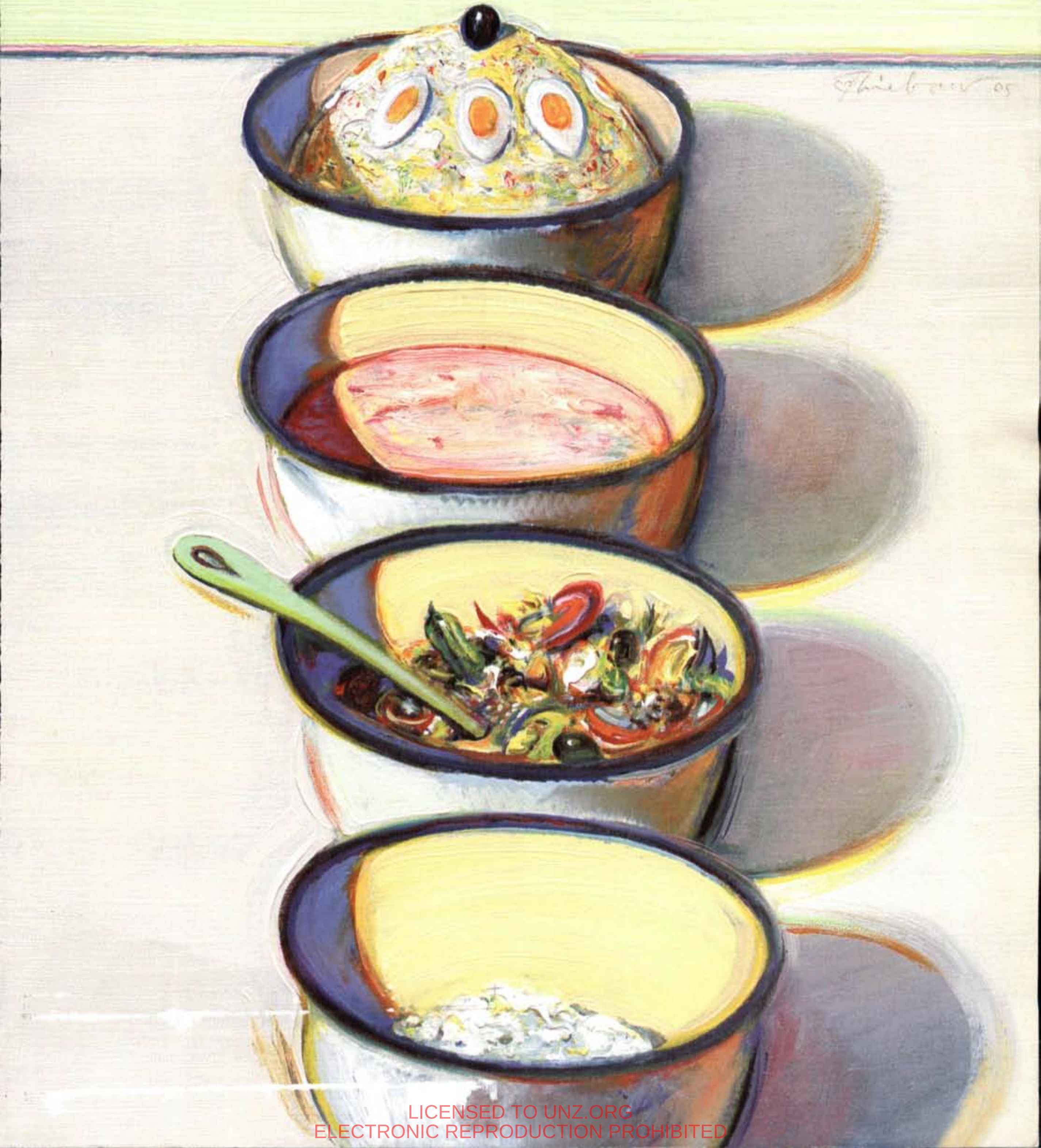

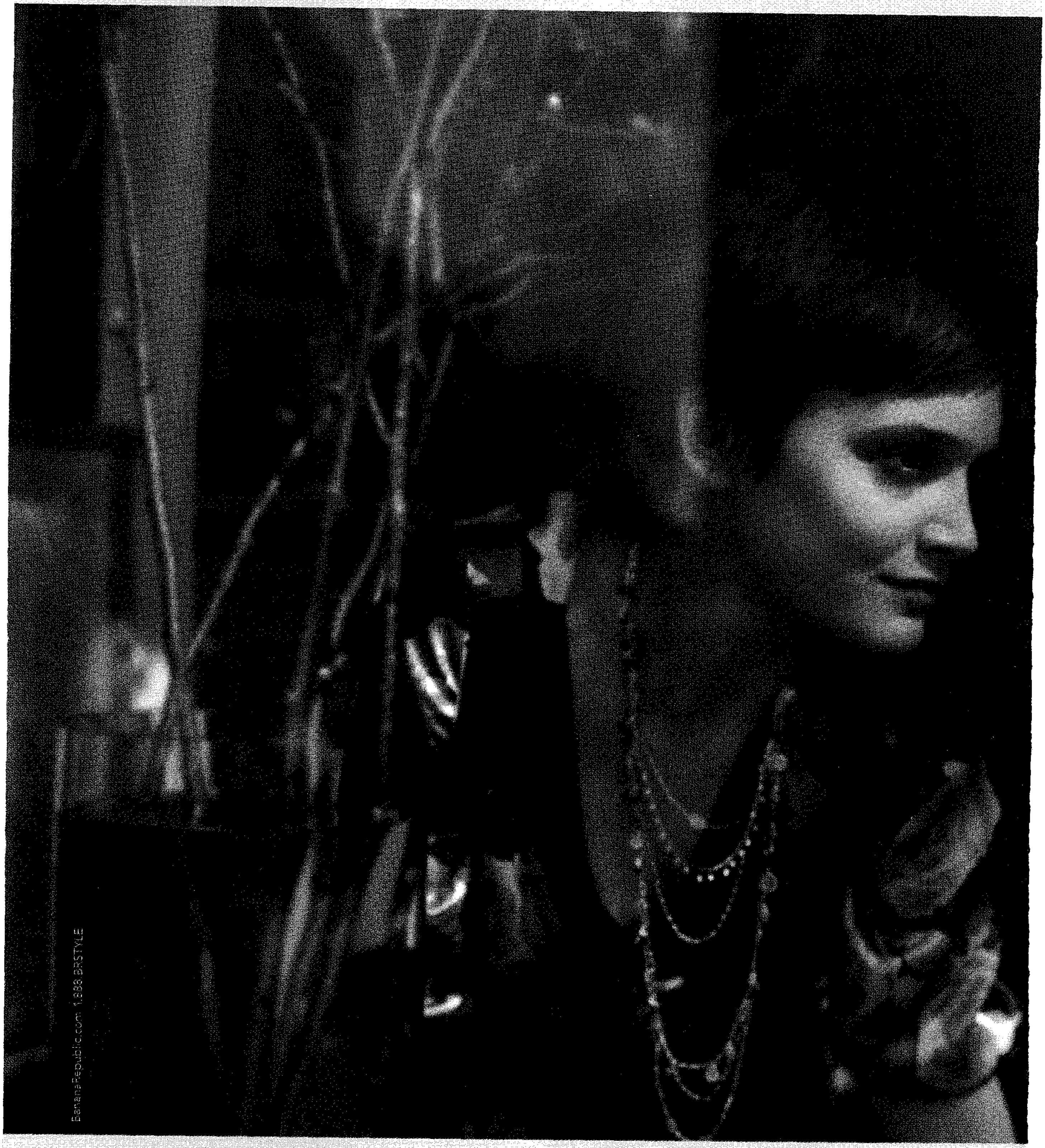

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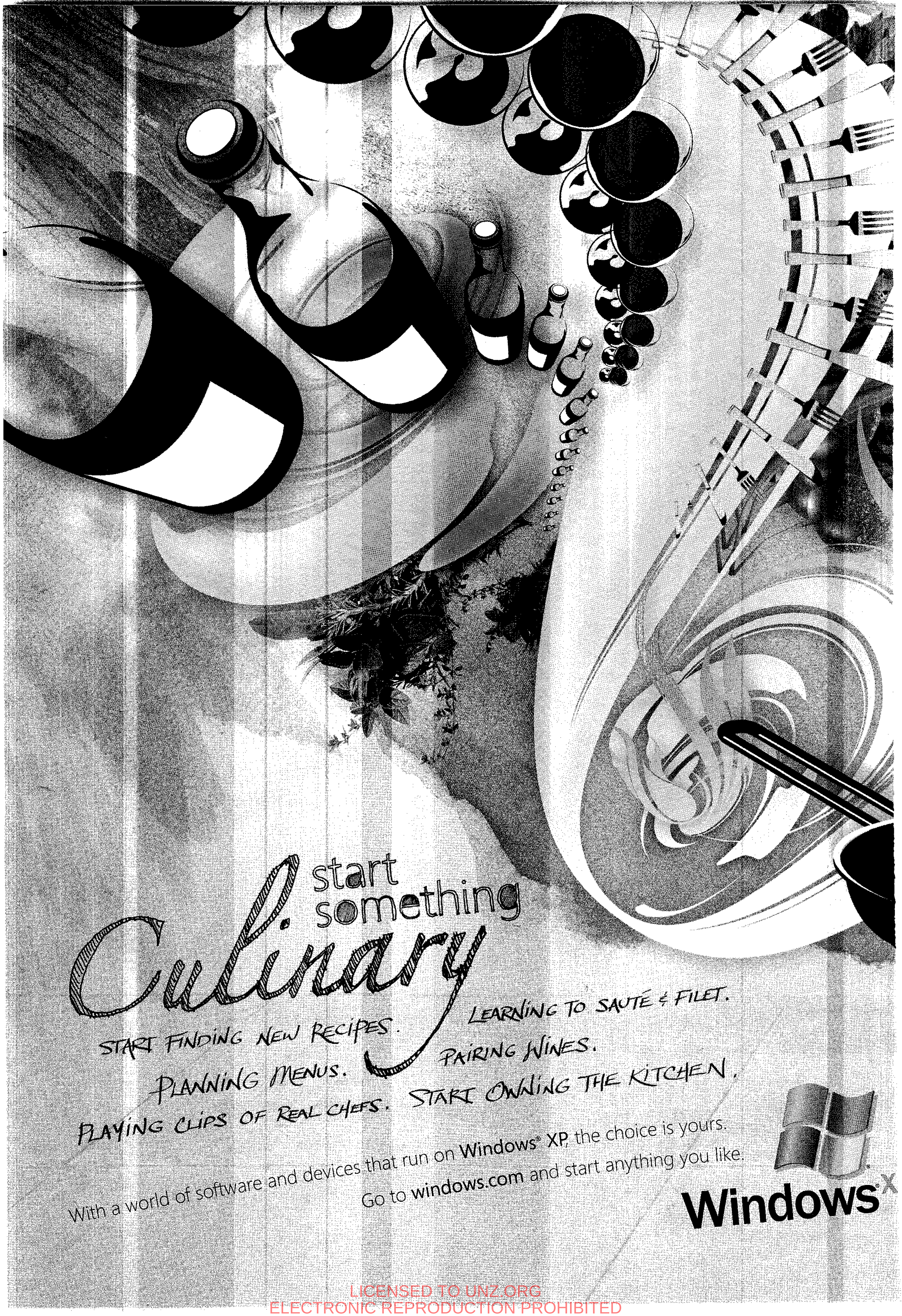
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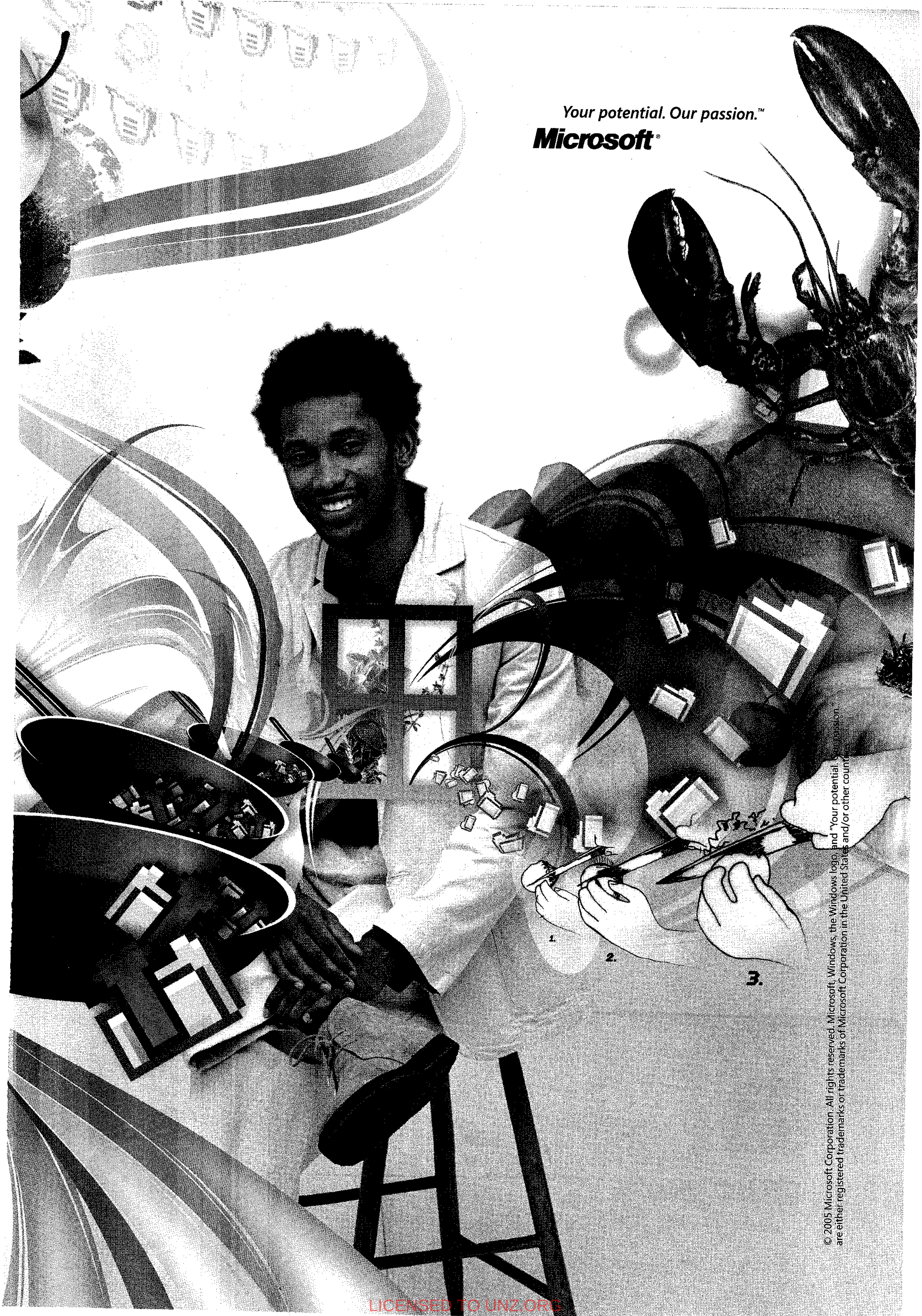

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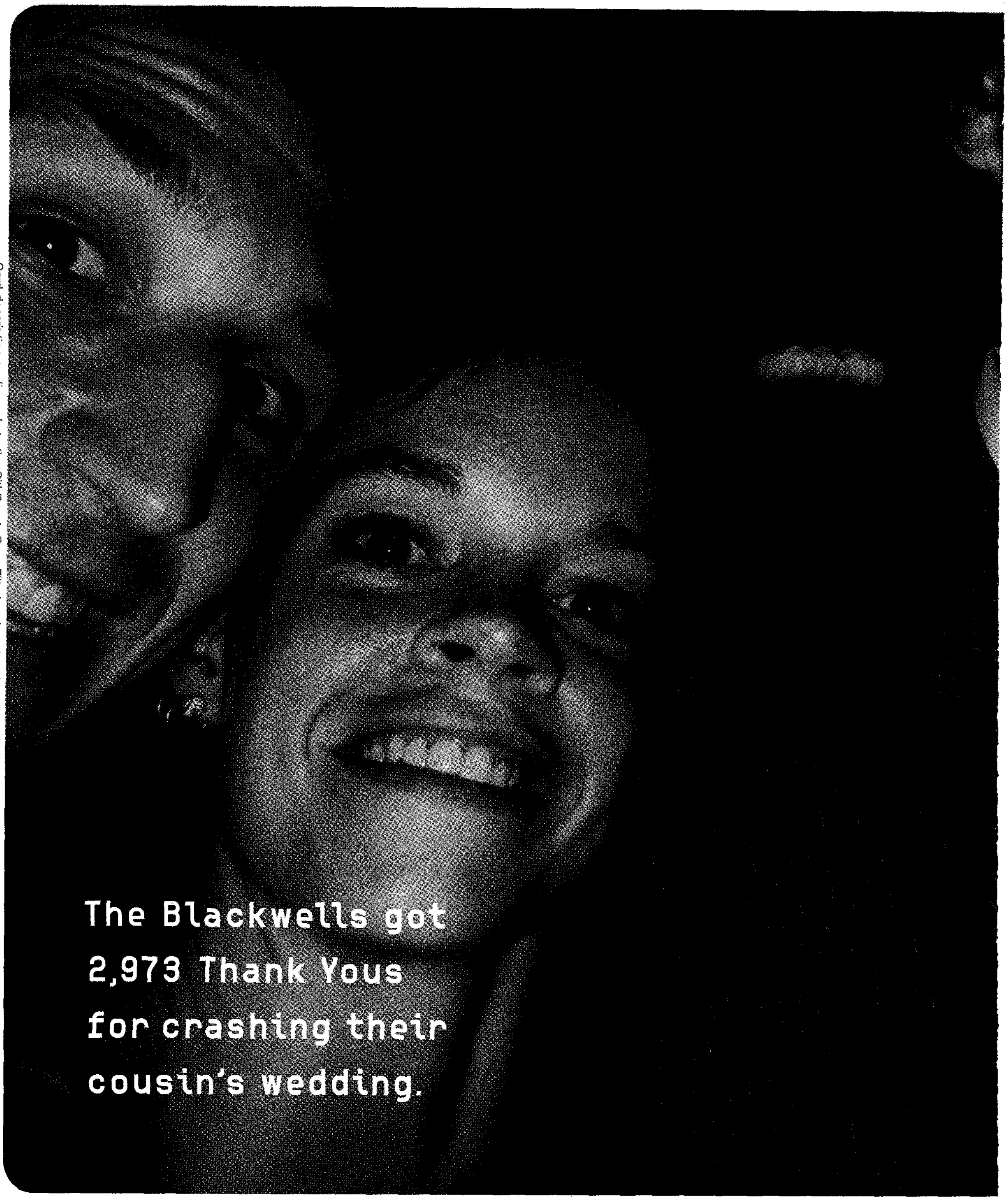
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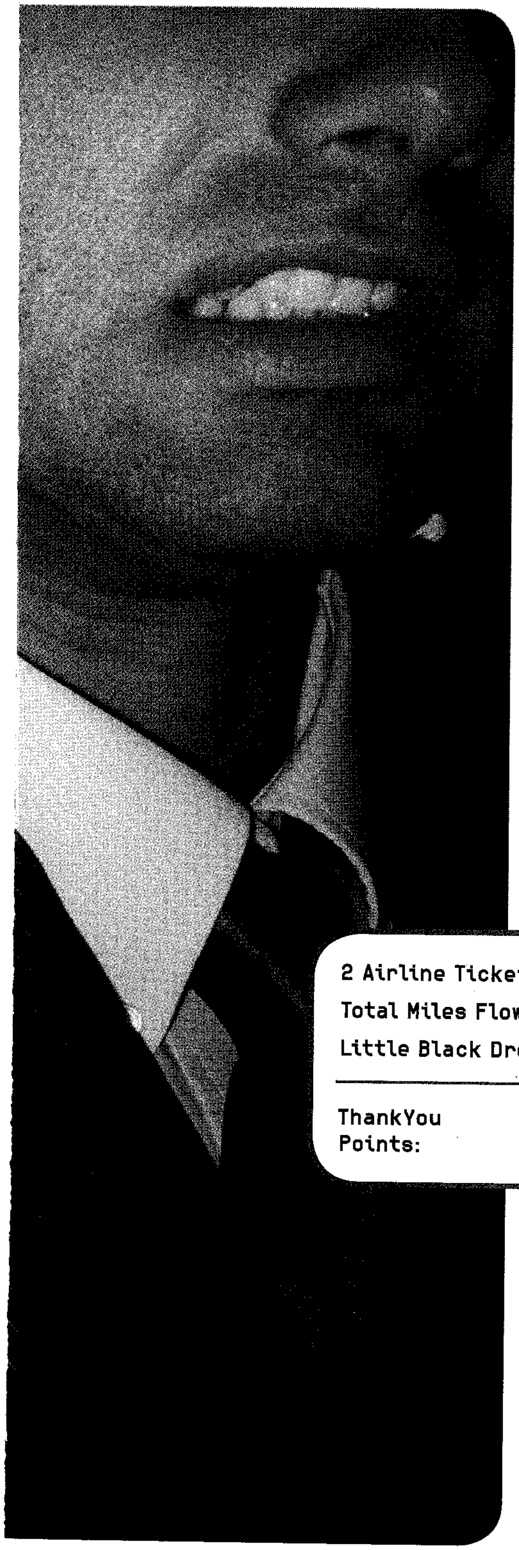

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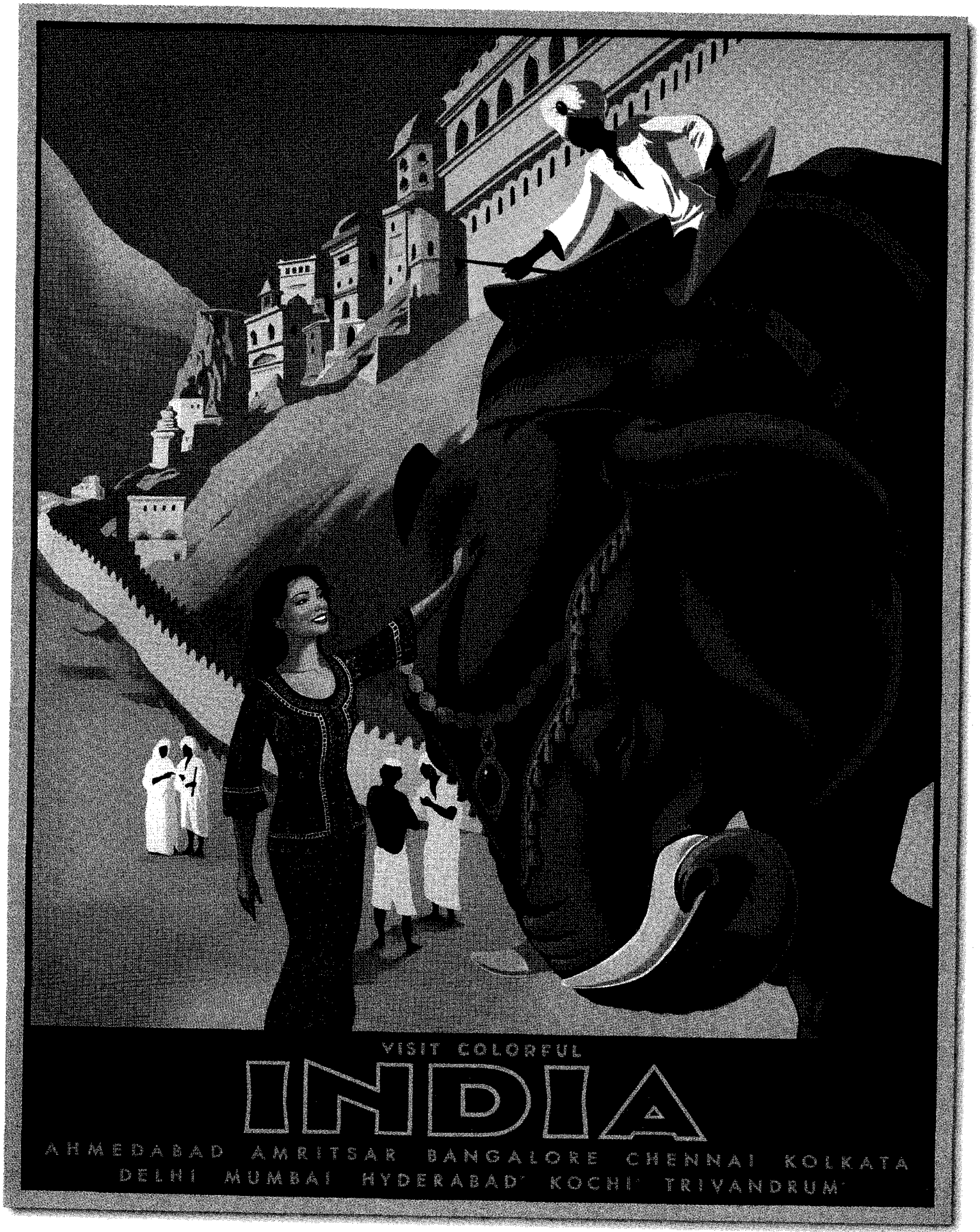
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So is this something you should be worried about?

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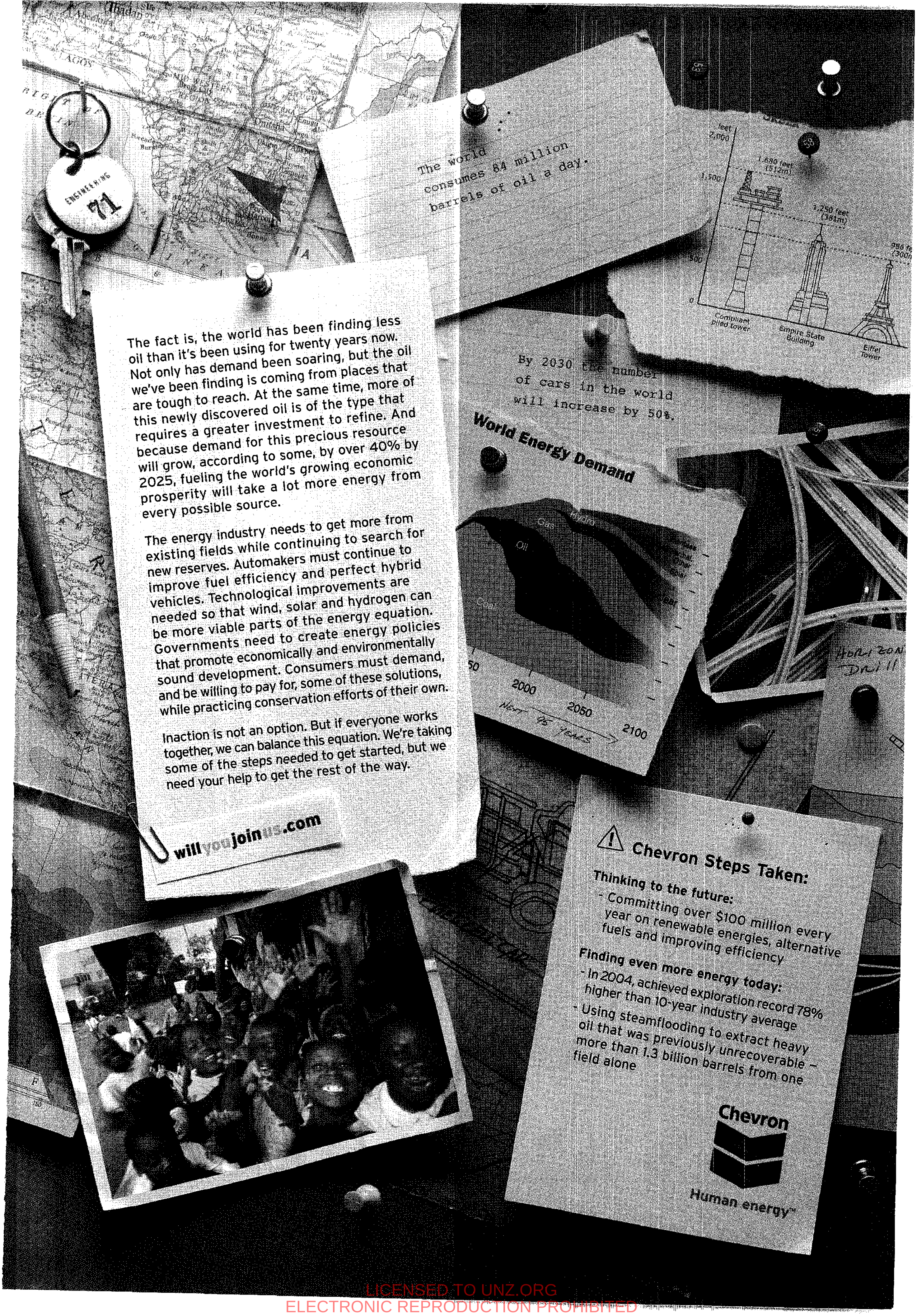

The world consumes 84 million barrels of oil a day.
feet
2,000
1,500
500
0
1,680 feet (512m)
1,250 feet (381m)
986 feet (300m)
Compliant piled tower
Empire State Building
Eiffel Tower
By 2030 the number of cars in the world will increase by 50%.
World Energy Demand
Gas
Hydro
Oil
Coal
2000
2050
2100
Next 95 years
Horizontal Drill

The fact is, the world has been finding less oil than it's been using for twenty years now. Not only has demand been soaring, but the oil we've been finding is coming from places that are tough to reach. At the same time, more of this newly discovered oil is of the type that requires a greater investment to refine. And because demand for this precious resource will grow, according to some, by over 40% by 2025, fueling the world's growing economic prosperity will take a lot more energy from every possible source.

The energy industry needs to get more from existing fields while continuing to search for new reserves. Automakers must continue to improve fuel efficiency and perfect hybrid vehicles. Technological improvements are needed so that wind, solar and hydrogen can be more viable parts of the energy equation. Governments need to create energy policies that promote economically and environmentally sound development. Consumers must demand, and be willing to pay for, some of these solutions, while practicing conservation efforts of their own.

Inaction is not an option. But if everyone works together, we can balance this equation. We're taking some of the steps needed to get started, but we need your help to get the rest of the way.

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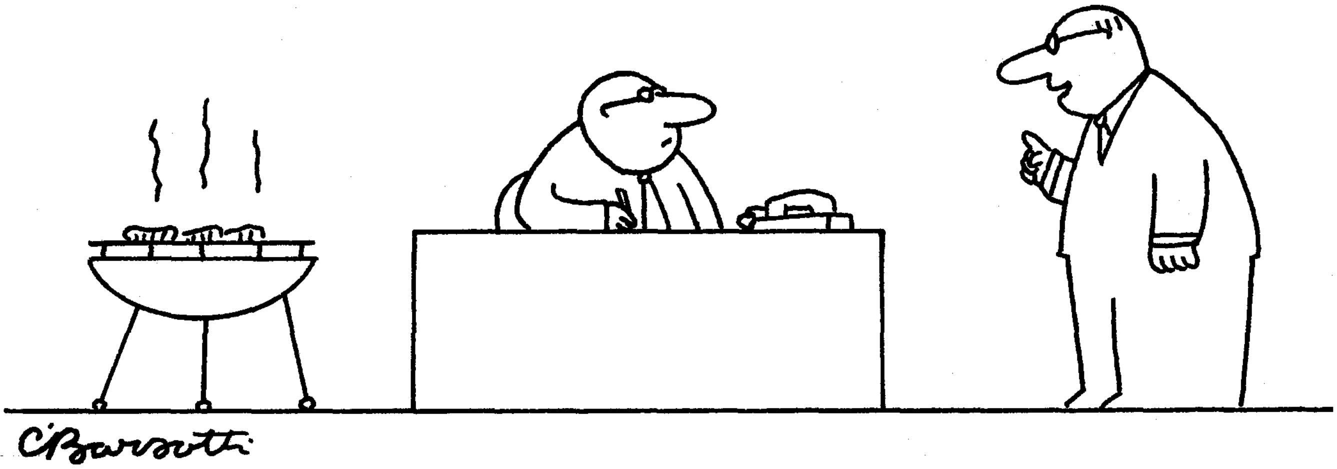
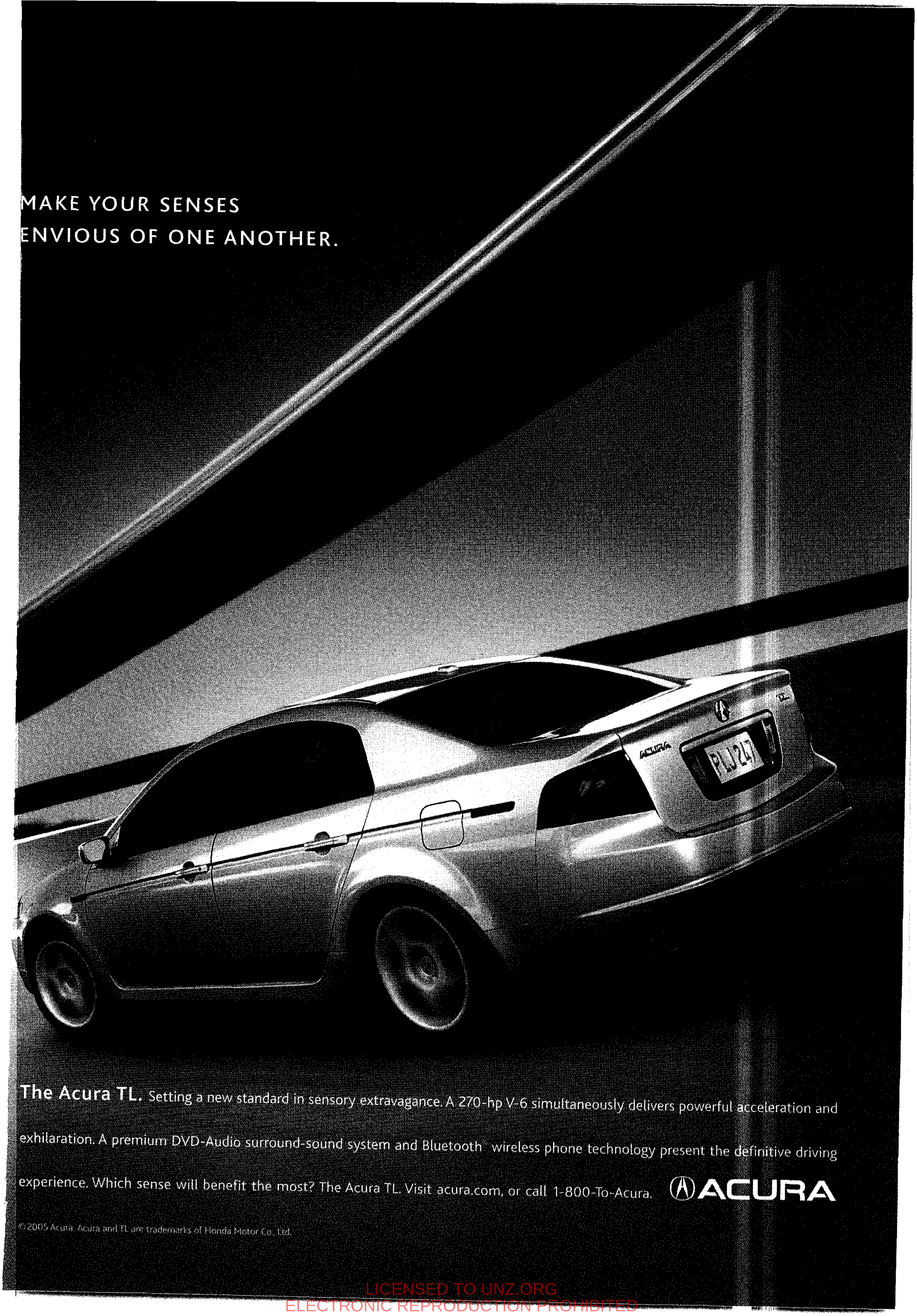


"Now, now, Grigsby, we must wait for the weekend."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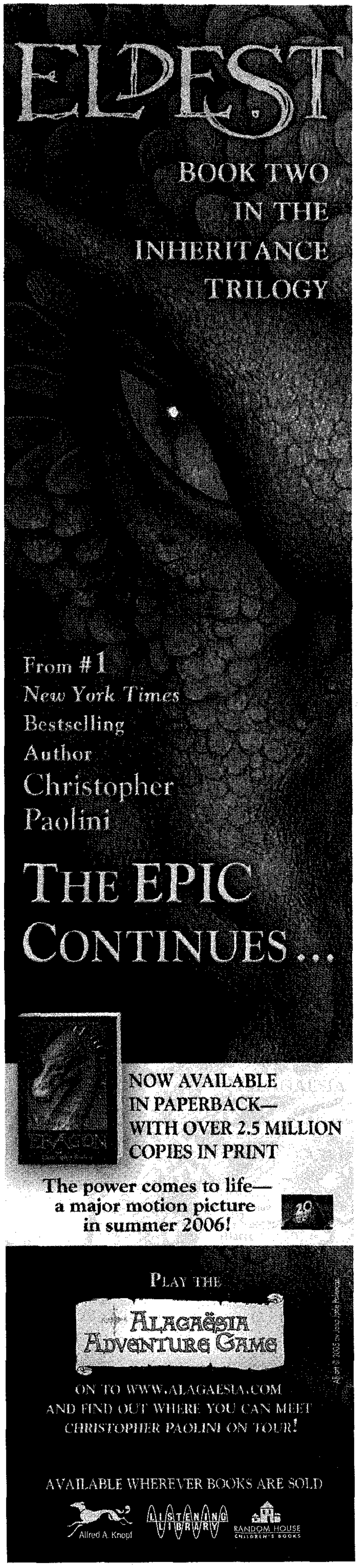
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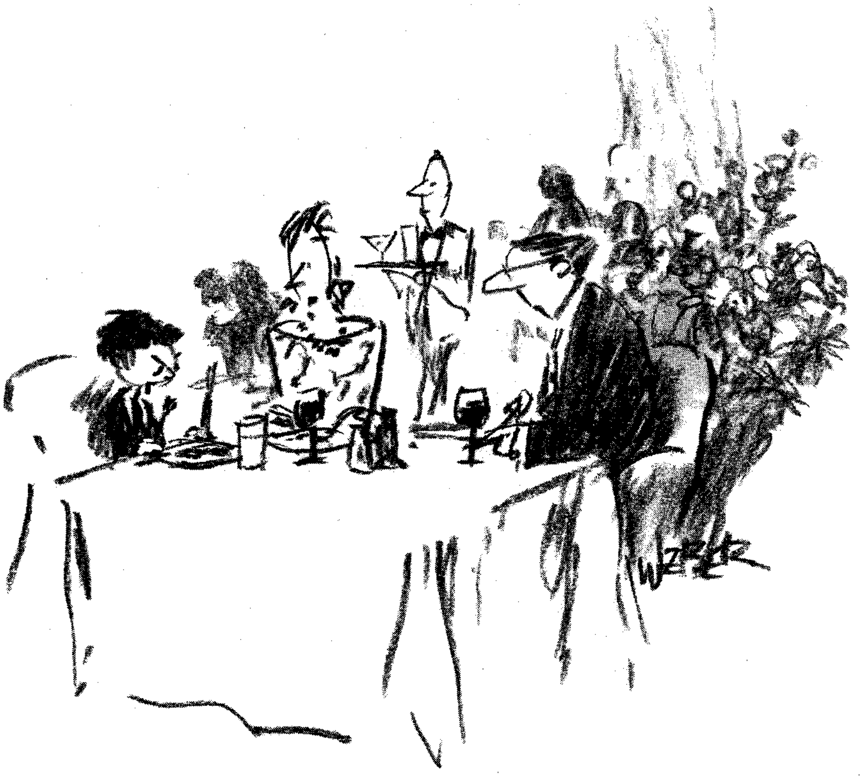
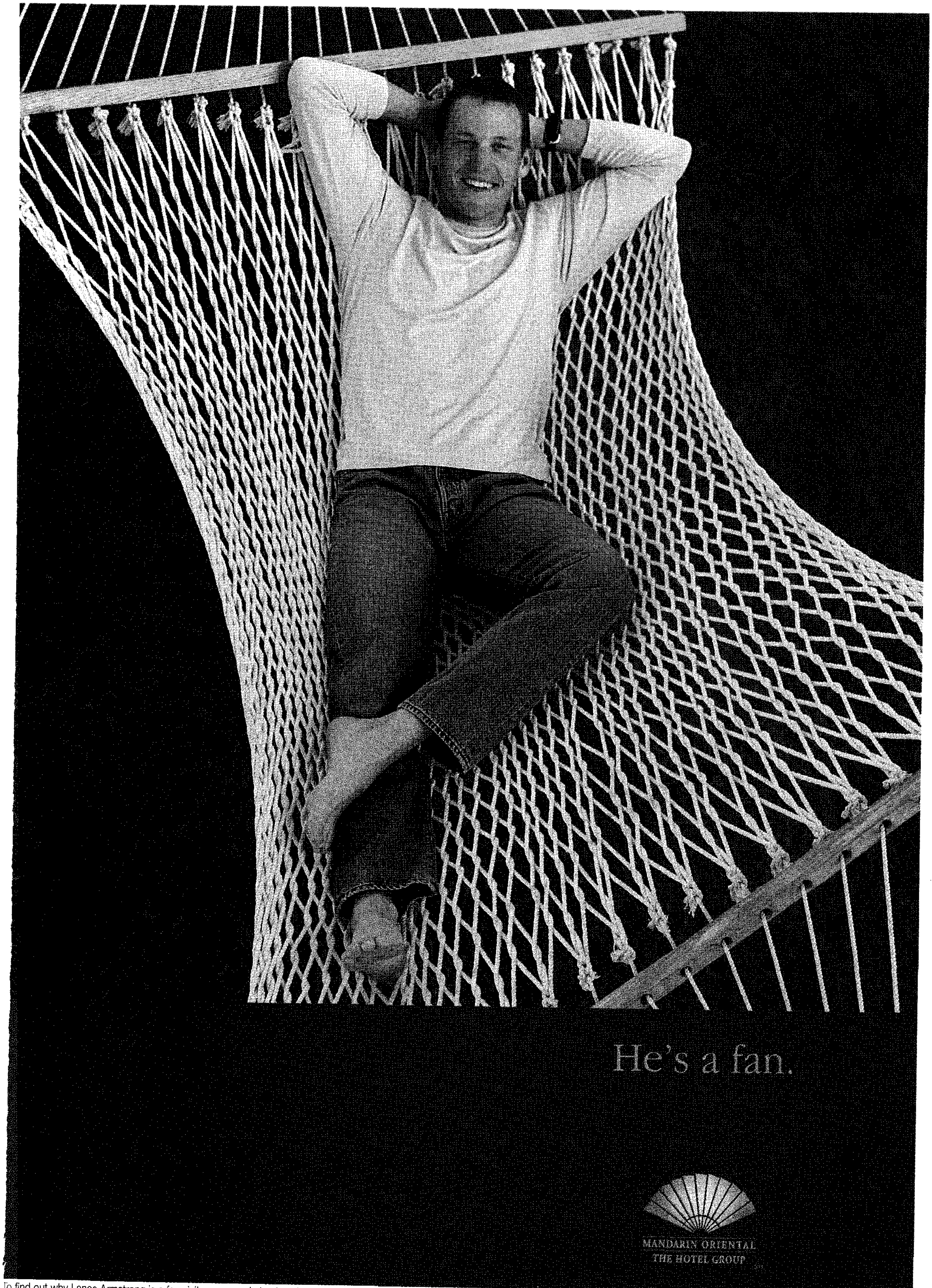


"Yuck. I could make better crêpes fourrées aux œufs brouillés au Parmesan myself."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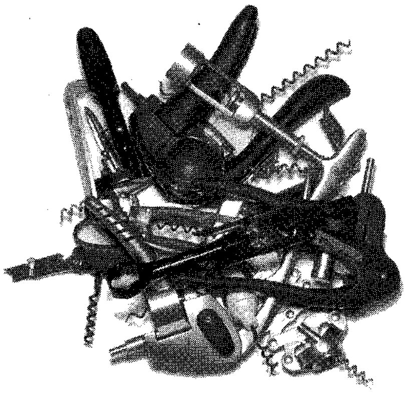

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GETTING TO KNOW THE POPE

In his comparison of the former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger with "an ideologically partisan jurist" whose "acrobatic interpretation" of the documents of Vatican II produces distorted theological results, Anthony Grafton fails to appreciate one fact of overwhelming significance: Pope Benedict XVI stands in relation to the Second Vatican Council not as a latter-day interpreter of its texts but as one of its founding fathers ("Reading Ratzinger," July 25th). Grafton writes that Ratzinger attended the Council as a *peritus*, or theological expert, "in the entourage" of Cardinal Josef Frings, of Cologne. Through his advice to Cardinal Frings, who was by then nearly blind and therefore unusually dependent on his gifted *peritus*, Father Ratzinger helped shape the outcome of the Council in a far more direct way than many of the bishops in attendance. Indeed, Ratzinger was probably second in influence only to the late Father Karl Rahner, S.J., among the theologians. Few men at the time, and certainly no man now living, was in a better position in the wake of the Council to give an authentic interpretation of what its decrees really meant. Much damage has been done to the Catholic Church in the past forty years in the name of "the spirit of Vatican II." What the Church received from the late Pope John Paul II (another active participant at the Council) and what she can expect to receive from Pope Benedict XVI is a clear-sighted, deeply rooted, and tenaciously strict adherence to "the letter of Vatican II."

John Mulderig
New York City

Benedict XVI is a complicated person, and Grafton manages to explain at least some of the complexity of his theological writings. But another explanation for the oscillation between profundity and naïveté that Grafton explores may be the fact that Ratzinger has for only short periods in his adult life been in the midst of the world. He moved rapidly from being an academic theologian in Germany to the Vatican, with only a brief time as a working bishop in between. While Ratzinger is an enormously gifted academician, he isn't the best interpreter of the lives of ordinary people. Unfortunately, Popes are expected to have something to say about everything, and some of them give in to the temptation. Grafton ends his essay with the hope that the openness to the voices of dissidents which Ratzinger displayed as a young scholar might return to aid him now. My preference would be that he draw on his brief interlude as Archbishop of Munich, where he had at least some contact, in a pastoral role, with the people of his Church.

Paul Lakeland
Professor of Catholic Studies
Fairfield University
Fairfield, Conn.

Grafton remarks that Benedict XVI's "loving eulogy for John Paul II, and the funeral Mass over which he presided, filled cardinals and pilgrims alike with affection for him, and helped him win rapid election as Pope." Of course, Ratzinger also had a preëlectoral boost, thanks to his role in John Paul II's appointment, in the last years of his life, of dozens of new (voting) members of the College of Cardinals. Grafton's conclusion that "a prelate who fears that the 'subtle seductions' of J. K. Rowling will stunt the spiritual growth of young Christians may find it harder than he thinks to take on modernity in all its sprawling strangeness" is similarly understated, since Ratzinger (circa 1990) declared that the Church was correct to condemn Galileo's heliocentric views.

Arndt von Hippel
Anchorage, Alaska

•

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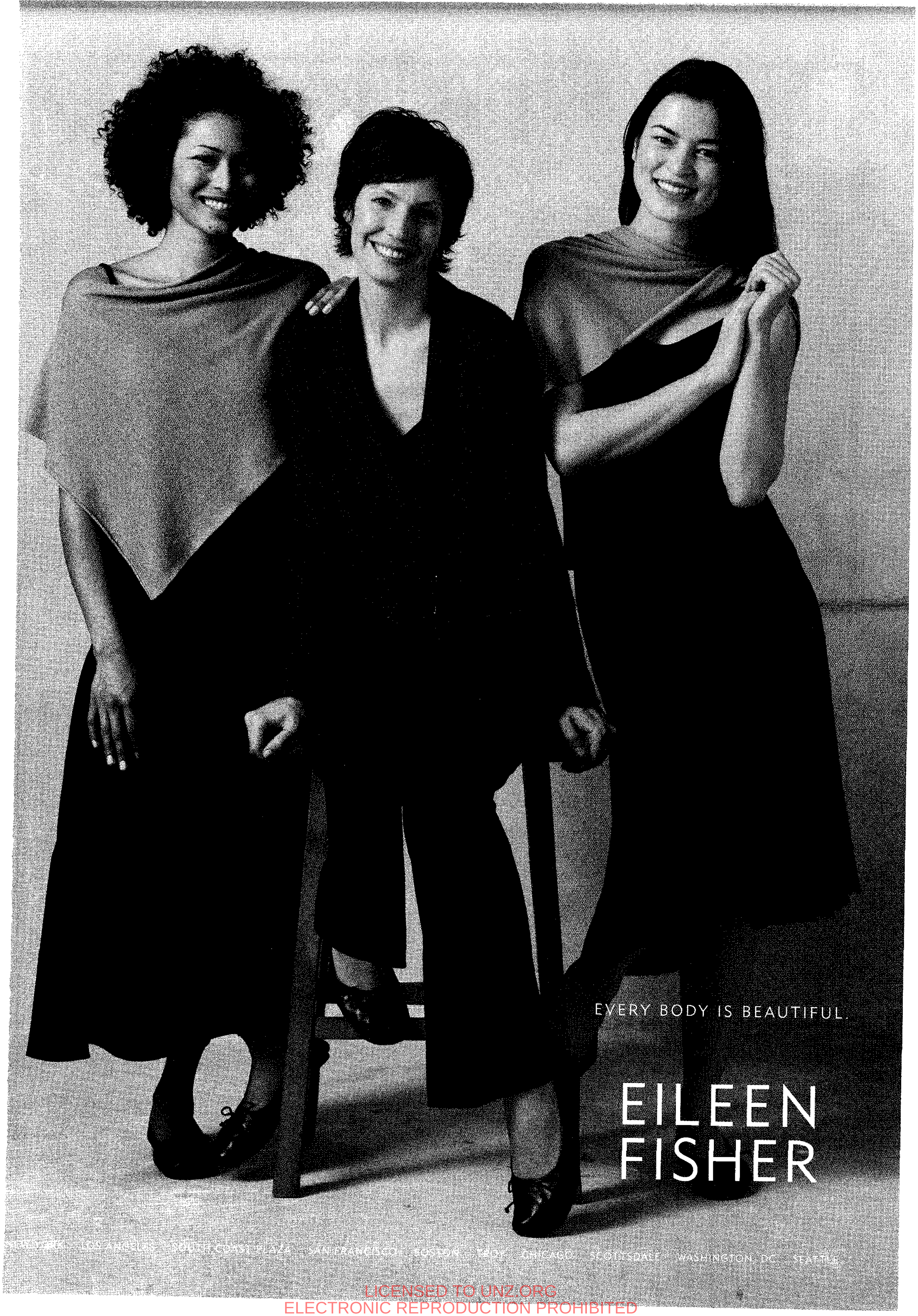
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The P.S. 1 "Warm Up 2005" series, at the museum in July. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
4	5	6	31	1	2	3

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE IN HER ROOM

The Atlantic Theatre Company opens its twentieth season with "The Intelligent Design of Jenny Chow," a comedy by the up-and-coming playwright Rolin Jones, about a phobic girl who builds missile parts in her bedroom. (See page 18.)

NIGHT LIFE COLD SEASON

The fall concert schedule gets under way in earnest this week with Coldplay's two-night stand at Madison Square Garden. The sensitive British quartet, led by the singer Chris Martin, has become the biggest band of the new decade by slightly refining the mopey, abstract sound of bands like Radiohead. Their latest album, "X&Y," has been snapped up by avid fans, and this week's shows, on Sept. 6-7, have been sold out for months. (See page 23.)

ART PLANT LOVE

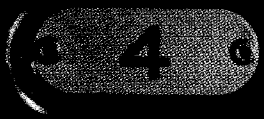
The New York Botanical Garden's "Waterlilies and Lotus: A Summer Aquatic Exhibition" includes wonders like the giant water lily of the Amazon, a night-blooming behemoth whose pads can grow up to seven feet in diameter. Inside the flower it's eighteen degrees warmer than the surrounding air, drawing the attention of pollinating beetles. Through Sept. 18. (See page 29.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC AT TRINITY

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the conductorless virtuoso band that usually performs at Carnegie Hall, offers a free concert of music by Brahms and Dvořák at Trinity Church. (See page 34.)

MOVIES IN COLOR

The garish, hyperrealist hues of the Technicolor printing process were phased out in the seventies, but the prints have survived. Walter Reade Theatre will screen eight films in their original Technicolor glory, including Douglas Sirk's 1956 melodrama "Written on the Wind," Alfred Hitchcock's horrific suspense thriller "The Birds," and, of course, "Singin' in the Rain." (See page 42.)



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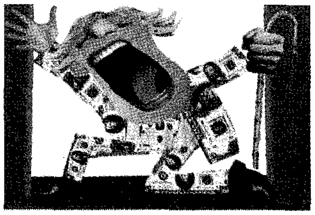
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TONE DEAF

Recently, the composer Michael John LaChiusa ("Marie Christine," "The Wild Party," "First Lady Suite") caused consternation on the Rialto by claiming in *Opera News* that the Broadway musical is dead, an unsupportable contention given current box-office tallies. He admits as much, but calls the hits "faux" musicals. "All sense of invention and craft is abandoned in favor of delivering what the audience thinks a musical should deliver," he wrote, slating "Hairspray" and "The Producers" and adding that there is "no challenge, no confrontation, no art." If the musical is dead, LaChiusa, who is the Maxwell Anderson of the genre, has put many nails in its coffin. Ersatz seriousness is as deadly as ersatz frivolity. The musical is the paradigm of show business. Through generations, its innovators have both wanted a mass communication and loved the mass. In his earnestness, LaChiusa displays the follies of the avant-garde artistic temperament. His own over-serious musicals show how hard joy and frivolity are to make. The musical is show business, which is both its honey and its cross. But, as Woody Allen reminds us, if it wasn't meant to be show business they would have called it "show show."



—*John Lahr*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE BREADWINNER
The refreshingly non-avant-garde Keen Company revives Somerset Maugham's comedy about a middle-class patriarch who decides to skip out on his tedious family. Directed by Carl Forsman. Previews begin Sept. 6. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-868-4444.)

DR. SEX
The love triangle between Dr. Alfred Kinsey, his wife, Clara, and their boyfriend, Wally, has become a musical comedy, with a score by Larry Bortniker and a book by Bortniker and Sally Deering. Directed by Pamela Hunt. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

FRAN'S BED
Mia Farrow stars in Playwrights Horizons' thirty-fifth-anniversary season opener, a play written and directed by James Lapine ("Passion," "Sunday in the Park with George"), about a woman who revisits her memories as she lies in a sickbed, surrounded by her family. In previews. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE GREAT AMERICAN TRAILER PARK MUSICAL
Set in a Florida trailer park called Armadillo Acres, this musical comedy has a book by Betsy Kelso (who directs), music and lyrics by David Nehls, and a set by Derek McLane ("I Am My Own Wife"). In previews. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE INTELLIGENT DESIGN OF JENNY CHOW
The Atlantic Theatre Company begins its twentieth-anniversary season with a comedy by the young playwright Rolin Jones, about an agoraphobic adopted girl who builds missile components for the U.S. Army while hunting for her birth mother. Jackson Gay directs. Previews begin Aug. 31. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

KISSING FIDEL
In a new play by Eduardo Machado ("The Cook"), which opens Intar's fortieth season, a Cuban-American in a rabidly anti-Castro Miami family incenses his relatives by declaring his intention to travel to Havana to make peace with Fidel. Michael John Garcés directs. Previews begin Sept. 6. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

MIRACLE BROTHERS
The Vineyard Theatre presents a new musical by Kirsten Childs, set in seventeenth-century Brazil, about two brothers, one black, one white. With choreography, featuring capoeira, by Mark Dendy. Tina Landau directs. In previews. (108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

MOTHER COURAGE
A new translation by Marc Blitzstein of Brecht's classic begins the Jean Cocteau Repertory's thirty-fifth season. David Fuller directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 4 at 3. (Bouwerie Lane, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

BELLY OF A DRUNKEN PIANO
The Australian performer Stewart D'Arrietta has a gravelly voice and a few hard-livin', hard-lovin' tales to tell—fortunate assets for a man who aims to re-create the music and mood of Tom Waits. In his rollicking cabaret act, which is backed by a three-person band, D'Arrietta balances unabashed reverence for Waits with his own share of seedy wisdom, drawing on several decades of songs by the prince of melancholy and spiking their boozy eloquence with tidbits from both his own life and his idol's. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

DEDICATION OR THE STUFF OF DREAMS
In Terrence McNally's current offering at 59E59 (a Primary Stages production), the rich, ailing, and arch Annabelle Willard (Marian Seldes) goes to meet Jessie and Lou (Alison Fraser and Nathan Lane) at a dusty, dilapidated space she owns, which they want to turn into a children's theatre. Mrs. Willard agrees to let the couple use the building if Lou will grant her two wishes. The first is that he twirl for her. The second is that he put her out of her misery (she is terminally ill) by killing her. As directed by Michael Morris, the scenes in which Mrs. Willard wields her power and Lou grapples with his moral quandary and humiliation are skillfully done. Ultimately, though, it's Morris, not McNally, who allows us to feel something: he mines the actors' body language as well as the pauses between gags for whatever complexity he can convey beyond McNally's talk, talk, talk. (Reviewed in our issue of 8/29/05.) (59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

DRUMSTRUCK
Catharsis comes in many forms, but on a hot summer evening there's nothing quite like banging on a *djembe*, keeping time with an ensemble of master African drummers and dancers. In this show from Johannesburg, each audience member is provided with a two-foot-tall drum, which the spirited performers demonstrate how to use to exhilarating effect. Highlights of this evening of traditional rhythms and music include a percussive dance from the Gauteng gold mines and the song "Jikele Maweni," a full-throated ballad made famous by Miriam Makeba. David Warren directs. (Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

JOY
An upbeat but uneven cast performs John Fisher's vapid comedy, which follows the romantic lives of a circle of gay and lesbian friends at a San Francisco university. Radical academics, closet cases, and cross-dressing surfer dudes alike are wrung through trite sitcom subplots, punctuated now and then with Gershwin and Cole Porter tunes. In several scenes, the actors "drink" from empty Martini glasses—a gesture that approximates the plight of the audience. Directed by Ben Rimalower. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 212-239-6200.)

LENNON
This show, or rather, revue, focusses, in standard musical-bio fashion, on Liverpool's "working-class hero" as he makes his way from the cradle to the grave, from his "Twist and Shout" days with the Beatles to his career as a solo artist, producing such ballads of white-male sensitivity as "Give Peace a Chance," "Woman," and "Beautiful Boy." Conceived and directed by Don Scardino, who also wrote the book, "Lennon" presents nine performers in the title role, meant to highlight the protagonist's multiple personae. But the conceit fails, mainly because Scardino seems less interested in the subtleties of interpreting a life story than in putting on a very, very big show with a very, very loud sound system. (8/29/05) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA
A lovely and complicated musical by Craig Lucas (book) and Adam Guettel (music and lyrics), based on Elizabeth Spencer's novella about a Southern lady who takes Clara, her beautiful but intellectually impaired daughter, to Florence, where she stumbles into a love affair. Clara is played by the clear-voiced Kelli O'Hara with just the right mix of guilelessness and passion; Victoria Clark, a genteel powerhouse, plays her mother, who struggles with her conscience as her daughter fights for her right to love. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

ONCE AROUND THE SUN
In this Faustian fairy tale about the business of rock, Kevin (Asa Somers), the front man of a downtown New York band, abandons his roots to pursue a solo career. With the help of an A-list diva (Maya Days), he launches head first into the perilous world of hit singles and magazine covers. The score, by Robert Morris, Steven Morris, and Joe Shane, is catchy, but it's short on indie cred, rendering void the show's swipes at commercial pop. While the talents of the cast and the design team are apparent, this squeaky-clean mu-

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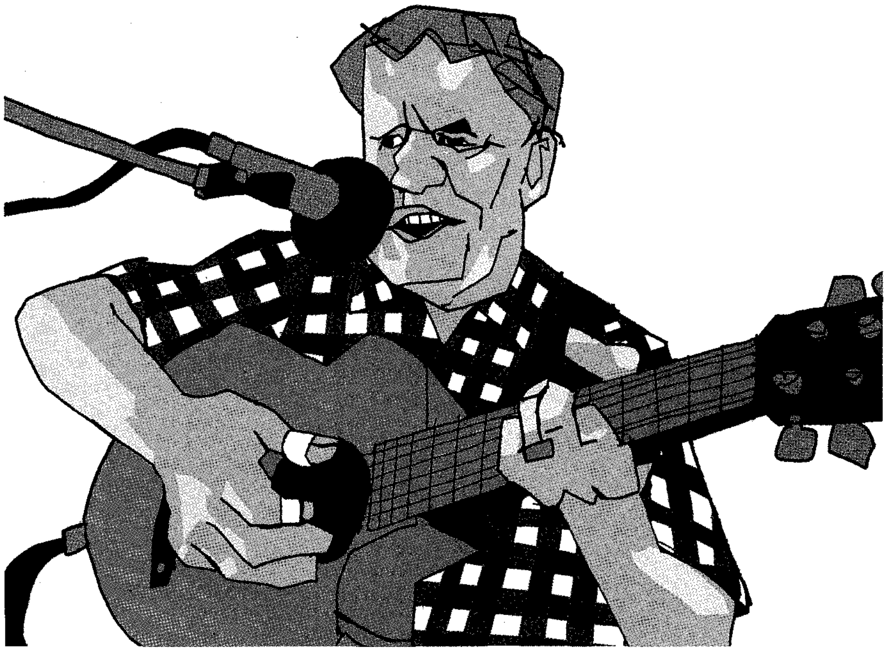
ONE-MAN STAR WARS TRILOGY
In this inspired act of madness, the Canadian actor Charles Ross recaps "Star Wars," "The Empire Strikes Back," and "The Return of the Jedi" in a single hour, portraying not only Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Darth Vader, Princess Leia, and Han Solo but R2-D2 (Ross's droid whistle-speech imitation is uncanny), AT-AT walkers, the trash-compactor snake, and even the floating words in the films' opening credits. Directed by TJ Dawe. (Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)



The flat-picking legend Doc Watson, at "Lincoln Center Out of Doors."

JEROEN KOOLHAAS

PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME!
At the Irish Repertory Theatre, an excellent cast revives Brian Friel's bittersweet 1964 play about Gar O'Donnell, a young Irishman who resolves to leave his home town of Ballybeg. As he ponders parting from the lads he knocked around with and the girl he loved, he splits into two characters: the clever, cynical Private Gar (James Kennedy) and his boyish alter ego, Public Gar (Michael FitzGerald). (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

SIDES: THE FEAR IS REAL
In a series of wickedly funny skits, Mr. Miyagi's Theatre Company—Sekiya Billman, Cindy Cheung, Paul H. Juhn, Peter Kim, Rodney To, and Hoon Lee—mercilessly caricature Asian-American actors caught up in the posturing, backstabbing, and nail-biting of the audition process. Briskly directed by Anne Kauffman. (45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE
The wracking tension of spelling-bee competition is turned into rollicking ironic fun in this musical by William Finn ("Falsettos") and Rachel Sheinkin, in which each speller hams up the role of a different school-yard stereotype. Directed by James Lapine. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 212-239-6200.)

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA
The Public Theatre's second Shakespeare in the Park production this summer is a revival of John Guare and Mel Shapiro's 1971 musical adaptation, with a score by Galt MacDermot ("Hair"). Kathleen Marshall directs. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?
Bill Irwin and Kathleen Turner give their final performances as George and Martha—a sparring couple who wear their marital war wounds like badges of honor—in the Broadway revival of Edward Albee's 1962 play, which closes on Sept. 4. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

OUT OF TOWN

BAY STREET THEATRE
B. D. Wong leads the cast in a revival of "Pippin," the tongue-in-cheek 1972 musical that imagines the coming-of-age struggles of Charlemagne's son. Music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and book by Roger O. Hirson. Jack Hofsiss ("The Elephant Man") directs. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500. Through Sept. 4.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
"Two Gentlemen of Verona" plays on the tented outdoor stage at the Boscobel Restoration. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Cold Spring, N.Y. 845-265-9575. Through Sept. 4.)

Also Playing

ALL SHOOK UP: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **ALTAR BOYZ:** Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG:** Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100. **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DOUBT:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100. **FOOLS IN LOVE:** Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. **FRESHLY SQUEEZED:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-307-4100. (Closes Sept. 4.) **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **MOVIN' OUT:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100. **ORSON'S SHADOW:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **THE PILLOWMAN:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **SWEET CHARITY:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING):** DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Sept. 1: **Three Dog Night,** celebrating its thirty-fifth anniversary, sends a little joy to the world. Sept. 6: **Obituary,** from Florida, and **Napalm Death,** from England, represent the best of two subgenres of punishing rock: death metal and grindcore, respectively. To a layperson's sensitive ears, the distinctions between them might seem nonexistent, but black-clad purists know better.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 31-Sept. 1: The Canadian rockers **Our Lady Peace.** Sept. 2: **Xiu Xiu,** purveyors of über-complex post-punk songs.

CUTTING ROOM
19 W. 24th St. (212-691-1900)—Sept. 1: **Rodrigo y Gabriela** are highly versatile guitar players originally from Mexico (they now live in Ireland). The two started off in a heavy-metal band in Mexico City, but they went acoustic shortly before they left for the Emerald Isle, in 1999. Their music is a mix of jazz, flamenco, and folk styles, made all the more compelling by the occasional Metallica song.

GIANTS STADIUM
The Meadowlands, East Rutherford, N.J. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 1: Eleven years ago **Green Day** released its major-label début, "Dookie." It was a smashing success, and its subjects (masturbation, dope smoking) are timeless. Still, it was easy to assume that the shelf life for the group, a trio of chip-toothed punks full of self-loathing, would be limited. But the boys have since ditched the toilet humor for epic political indignation, and their latest release, "American Idiot," hit the top of the charts.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Sept. 1: The up-and-coming glam rockers **Louis XIV.** Sept. 6: **CKY** (short for Camp Kill Yourself) play workaday alternative metal that might have sounded fresh a decade ago.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Sept. 2: The vocalist **Maria de Barros** was born in Dakar, Senegal, but she prefers the sensuous songs of her parents' birthplace, Cape Verde. Sept. 4: The **Asylum Street Spankers** are an energetic group of acoustic-blues-loving musicians out of Austin, Texas. Sept. 5: **Sara Kramer,** the nineteen-year-old star of the Broadway hit "Mamma Mia!" Sept. 6: **Greg Garing,** a longtime member of the local old-time country scene.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Sept. 1: **Chinese Stars.** The Providence quartet, which is made up of former members of Arab on Radar and Six Finger Satellite, plays chaotic dance punk with plenty of noisy guitar and wailing, distorted lyrics—not to mention the frenzied vocals of its front man, Eric Paul.

"LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS"
Sept. 3: **Doc Watson** swings by for the annual "Roots of American Music" concerts this weekend. Watson has long been honored for his pioneering flat-picking work (President Carter called him a "national treasure," and President Clinton gave him a National Medal of the Arts), but the guitarist, who went blind as an infant, remains a humble servant of the music. "I'm not a celebrity," he reportedly told the crowd at a recent show in Newton, North Carolina. "I'm just as informal as I'd be if you were in my house. I hope you appreciate that." The eighty-two-year-old plays everything from Elizabethan ballads to bluegrass standards and country classics with a wit, vigor, and virtuosity that should be the envy of younger men. Sept. 4: The festival continues with **Suzy Bogguss**

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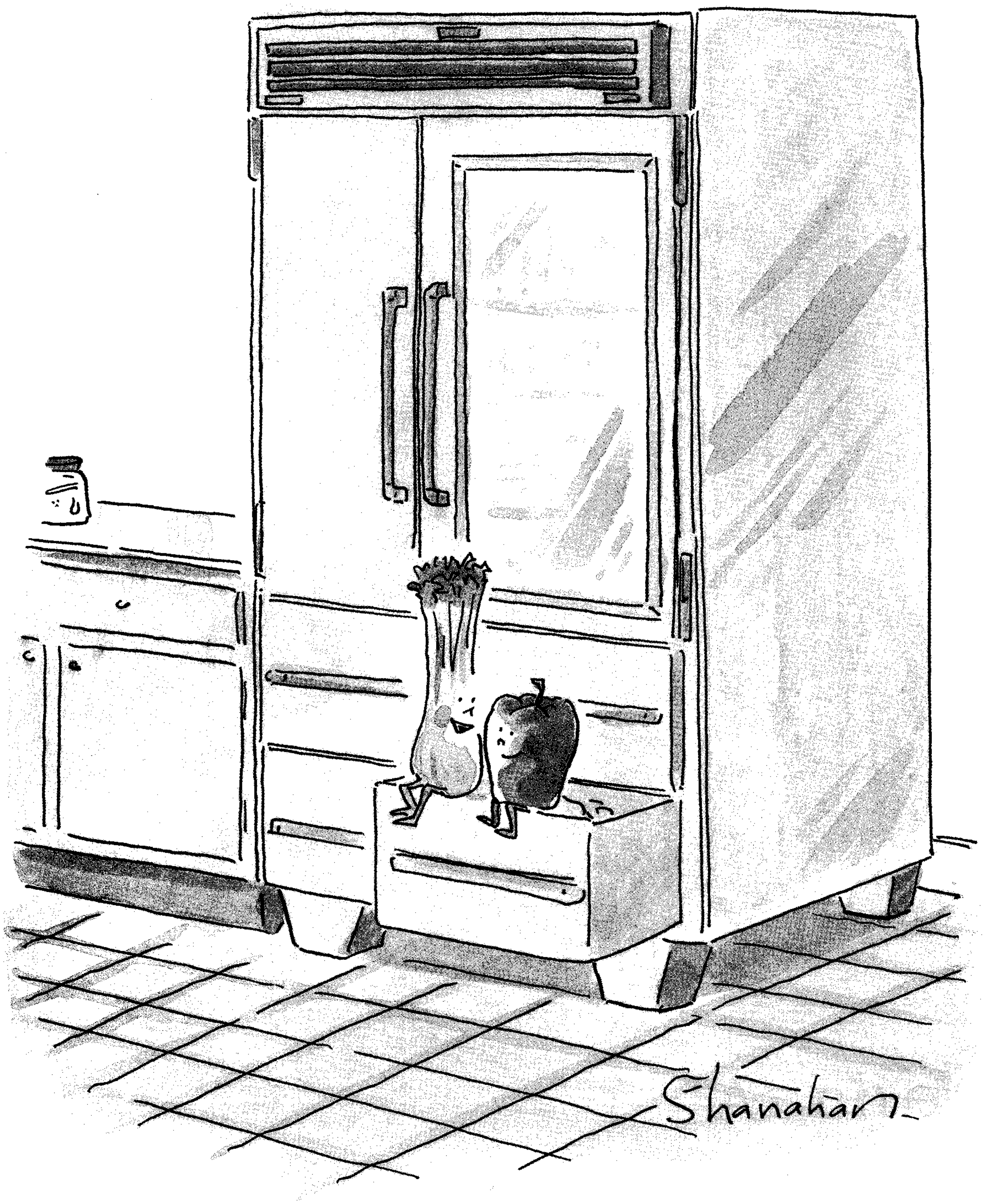

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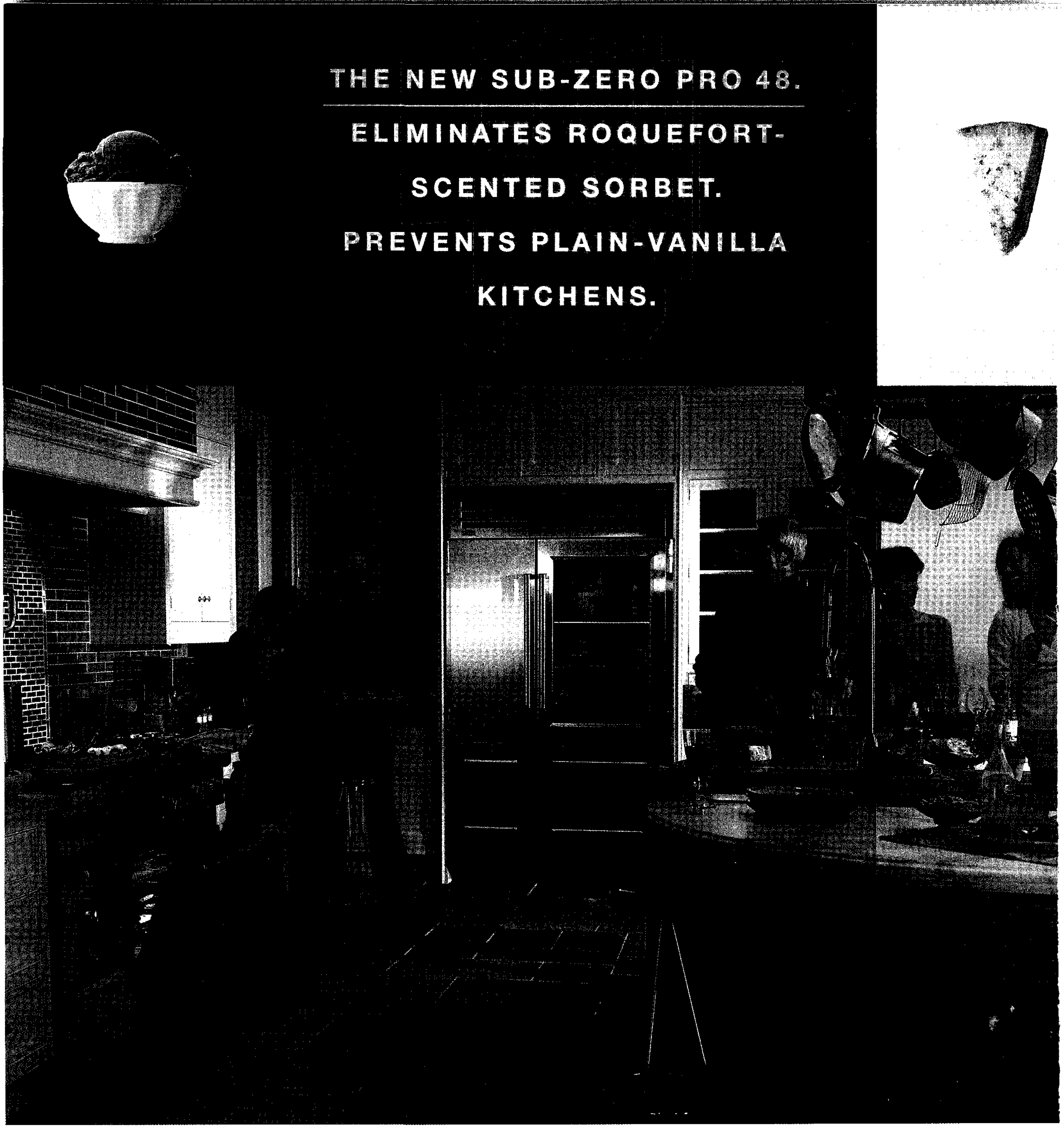
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and **Ricky Skaggs.** (Damrosch Park. For more information about the festival, call 212-875-5766, or visit www.lincolncenter.org.)

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 6-7: Britain's **Coldplay,** which has become one of the world's biggest bands on the strength of three albums of hook-laden arena rock, continues its quest to eclipse its forefathers, U2. With **Rilo Kiley,** which sprang to life more than a decade ago in the lo-fi underbrush and has since grown into a towering pop band. Credit goes not only to the clear-sky vocals of the front woman, Jenny Lewis, and the mellow guitar playing of Blake Sennett but also to their combined sense of adventurousness.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Aug. 31: **Mark Geary,** an Irish singer-songwriter who used to open for Jeff Buckley at the old Sin-é, back when it was in the East Village. Later that night, **Miho Hatori,** formerly of Cibo Matto, drops in with a cadre of downtown musicians for a night of Brazilian and Japanese avant pop. Sept. 2: **Sons and Daughters,** from Glasgow, features two former associates of the melancholic Scottish outfit Arab Strap. They made their début in 2003 with an EP, "Love the Cup," that paid tribute to Johnny Cash and embraced the big, bad American West. They maintain the Man in Black's hard-edged attitude on their new album, "The Repulsion Box."

SATALLA
37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—Sept. 3: The saxophonist **Cedric (Im) Brooks** is a Kingston native and one of the bedrock performers of reggae music—in the late sixties he was a key member of Clement (Coxsone) Dodd's loose Studio One confederation. Brooks's own playing combines other Caribbean rhythms and free-jazz and Afro-beat elements. His music expands the mind while lifting the spirits.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Aug. 31: **Hamell on Trial.** A thorny folk troubadour who traded in his Pete Seeger records for albums by Lou Reed and Iggy Pop, Ed Hamell delivers dicey urban narratives like a one-man Scorsese flick. With an admirable capacity for detail and the punchy delivery of the Jim Carroll Band circa "People Who Died," Hamell is both an ace storyteller and a credible rocker, which is no mean feat.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Aug. 31-Sept. 3: **Lew Tabackin** was the star soloist of his wife's band, the Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra, for more than three decades. Akiyoshi dissolved the group recently, giving Tabackin plenty of time to exhibit his brawny tenor and lilting flute work. His ensemble here includes the trumpeter **Tom Harrell.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Aug. 30-Sept. 4: The **Ron Carter** quartet and the **Jeff (Tain) Watts** quartet. Modern acoustic bassists everywhere can thank Carter for putting their instrument on the map. After high-profile experience playing, either live or in the studio, with practically every major jazz figure of the past forty years, Carter is now as recognizable a name as the giants he's worked for. Watts is a drummer who answers to an extroverted muse. He's played with both Wynton and Branford Marsalis, and continues to be the most in-demand percussionist of his generation.

DANNY'S
346 W. 46th St. (212-265-8133)—**Annie Ross,** the English actress and singer who's best known for her work with the jazz-vocal group Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, is here Wednesdays until the end of September. Blossom Dearie, who's usually here Saturdays and Sundays, is on hiatus through Oct. 15; Ross will sit in for her on select Saturdays until her return.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Aug. 30-Sept. 4: **Wess (Warmdaddy) Anderson,** an associate of Wynton Marsalis, wields assertive alto and soprano saxophones; he tinges his playing with the bluesy bonhomie of his New Orleans heritage. His quartet here features the pianist **Marc Carey.**

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Sept. 1-4: **Carla Bley's Lost Chords** brings together the brilliant composer and arranger—and idiosyncratic pianist—with her longtime collaborator **Steve Swallow** on electric bass and the British saxophonist **Andy Sheppard** for some skewed chamber jazz.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—**Danilo Perez,** one of the galvanizing elements of the Wayne Shorter quartet, explores his Latin roots when leading his own small group. He's here with a trio Sept. 1-4.

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—The avant-leaning trumpeter **Roy Campbell, Jr.,** is the curator in September of this newish downtown music space. He makes room for its founder, **John Zorn,** on Sept. 2 and the multi-instrumentalist and demi-legend **Gunter Hampel** on Sept. 3. He's here with his own ensemble on Sept. 6. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Aug. 30-Sept. 4: The drummer **Brian Blade,** on a break from the Wayne Shorter quartet, leads his Fellowship ensemble, featuring the saxophonists **Myron Walden** and **Chris Cheek** and the guitarist **Kurt Rosenwinkel.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

CLASSICAL NOTES
FREE RADICALS

Long before the days when assistant professors wrote tone rows for tenure, American modernism was something worth fighting for. And perhaps no one fought harder than Carl Ruggles (1876-1971), a hardscrabble New England eccentric (and friend of Charles Ives) whose compositional technique was so rudimentary that a lifetime of labor resulted in only twelve published works—just enough for a single concert.

For Ruggles lovers, that has never been enough, and the pianist Donald Berman has slaked their thirst with "The Uncovered Ruggles" (New World Records), première recordings of sketches painstakingly realized by Berman's teacher John Kirkpatrick (such as a surprisingly winsome "Valse Lente") as well as persuasive performances of familiar works (like the "Evocations," for piano, or the song "Toys," lovingly rendered by the soprano Susan Narucki). Berman is an artist both forceful and discreet: he easily provides the big tone that Ruggles's arching lines of dissonant counterpoint require, yet he is also sensitive to the poignantly timeless quality that these strange works have.

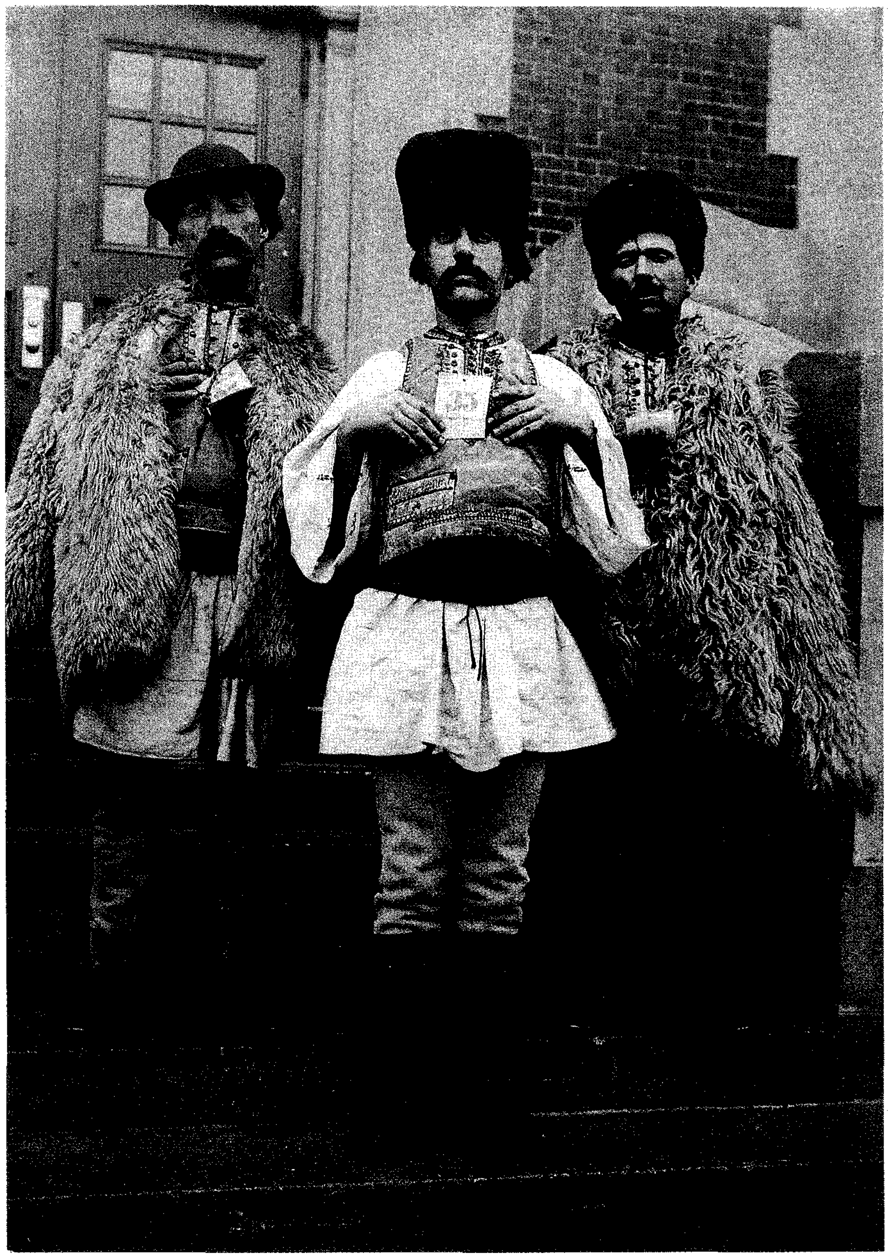
Ruggles may have been a true voice in the wilderness, but the contemporary composer Lukas Foss has suffered from the perception of always being late to the party. A close friend and associate of Copland and Bernstein, he is a more natural composer for the keyboard than either of them were, as a delightful new disk (on Naxos) by the pianist Scott Dunn proves. Dunn's playing—lean, incisive, occasionally flamboyant—is very different from Berman's, and he has just the touch this music needs. Listening to the gently spun neoclassicism of the "Fantasy Rondo," the introspective neo-Romanticism of the "Passacaglia," or the engrossing, complex minimalism of "Solo," the lasting quality of Foss's work becomes clear. A progressive traditionalist, he reduced the styles of his colleagues down to their simplest forms, reflecting back on them in works that are at once lucid, intricate, and humane. The affectionate epigram "For Lenny"—a jazzy deconstruction of Bernstein's "New York, New York" built over a habanera rhythm—is the ultimate example.

—Russell Platt

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Matisse: The Fabric of Dreams, His Art and His Textiles,"** a revelatory, achingly beautiful show, pairs items from the artist's personal fabric collection with paintings and graphic works in which they played crucial roles. Through Sept. 25. ♦ Two recent installations are on view in **"Tony Oursler at the Met: 'Studio' and 'Climaxed.'"** The first contemplates influences on the artist through an assemblage of pieces by the likes of Jacqueline Humphries, Rem Koolhaas, and Kaare Rafoss. The second, more traditional Oursler work is a giant, lumpy potato head with flames and a blinky face projected on it, its mouth voicing demented and hilarious threats, boasts, and sorrows. Through Sept. 18. ♦ **"John Townsend: Newport Cabinetmaker"** presents a few dozen pieces by a prominent Colonial American furniture-maker alongside work by his contemporaries. Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Sol LeWitt on the Roof: Splotches, Whirls, and Twirls."** A summer installation in the roof garden, featuring five spiky stalagmite sculptures and a wall drawing. Through Oct. 30. ♦ **"The Armored Horse in Europe, 1480-1620"** is a one-room show of leather and metal examples from the golden age of the obsolete craft of horse armor. Items range from brutally practical sets made for low-ranking soldiers to more fanciful designs displayed by kings in military parades. Through Jan. 15, 2006. ♦ What is beguiling and perhaps surprising in **"Cameo Appearances,"** an assortment of small carved-stone items drawn from the Met's world-class collection, is the exactitude of the likenesses achieved—one realizes afresh why such rings, brooches, and miniatures would have been treasured as portraits and traded as keepsakes. With examples dating from the Roman Empire through the Renaissance (a sleeping shepherdess with her flock) and on to the nineteenth century (Admiral Nelson in beaky profile), this lapidary little show also explains the difference between cameos (raised reliefs) and intaglios (incised engravings). Through Jan. 29, 2006. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Pioneering Modern Painting: Cézanne and Pissarro, 1865-1885"** chronicles the careers of two friends who gave each other a leg up into brave new styles



Augustus F. Sherman's "Romanian Shepherds," from the early twentieth century, on view through September 5 at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum.

and techniques, though it quickly becomes clear that Cézanne, the younger artist by a decade, vaulted much higher. Through Sept. 12. ♦ Beginning a year after the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens and continuing for the next decade, **Frank Gohlke** recorded the utter devastation and gradual regeneration of a site that had been blasted back to prehistory. In the process, he turned into a latter-day Ansel Adams. Although his aerial views and panoramic vistas of what appear to be primordial mountainsides aren't conventionally picturesque, they do have a tough, undeniable magnificence and the presence of modern classics. Through Sept. 26. ♦ **"The High Line"** details Field Operations and Diller Scofidio & Renfro's ambitious urban rails-to-trails scheme for the abandoned elevated tracks that run along the West Side from Gansevoort Street to Thirty-fourth Street. Through Oct. 31. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Selections from the permanent collection are on display, including a clutch of canvases by Vasily Kandinsky in the museum's recently inaugurated Kandinsky Gallery. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Robert Smithson,"** a retrospective of drawings, constructions, and collages, includes filmed, photographed, and sketched documentation of the iconic "Spiral Jetty." Through Oct. 23. ♦ Work by eight artists, including Terry Winters, Ati Maier, and Matthew Ritchie, is on display in **"Remote Viewing: Invented Worlds in Recent Painting and Drawing."** Through Oct. 9. ♦ The eclectic gathering of works from the permanent collection in **"Landscape"** ranges from Jasper Johns's white maps to Ed Ruscha's rows of L.A. streets and Roni Horn's eerie comparison of the body and the earth, "Becoming a Landscape" (1999-2001). Through Sept. 18. ♦ **"Banks Violette: Untitled"** contemplates the romantic sublime with a model of a ruined church cast in salt and music composed by the black-metal musician Snorre Ruch. Through Oct. 2. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA

120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (917-663-2453)—**"Past Presence: Childhood and Memory"** is a slight but intriguing show about childish urges and experiences. Charles LeDray addresses the compulsion to collect, with a case of two thousand tiny, pure-white porcelain vessels, too small to be anything but toys or art. A pair of Gary Simmons pieces mimic chalkboards, echoing both Cy Twombly and his own recent smudged-word paintings. Robert Beck's charcoal drawings on paper use appropriated images from a book on manly skills (one demonstrates how to skin a bunny) to evoke a boy's simultaneous attraction and resistance to growing up. And Peggy Preheim's small graphite drawings—of children, dogs, leaves, a lizard held in a hand—form a disjointed narrative, like snapshots or brief memory flashes of the world at its most marvellous. Through Oct. 13. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

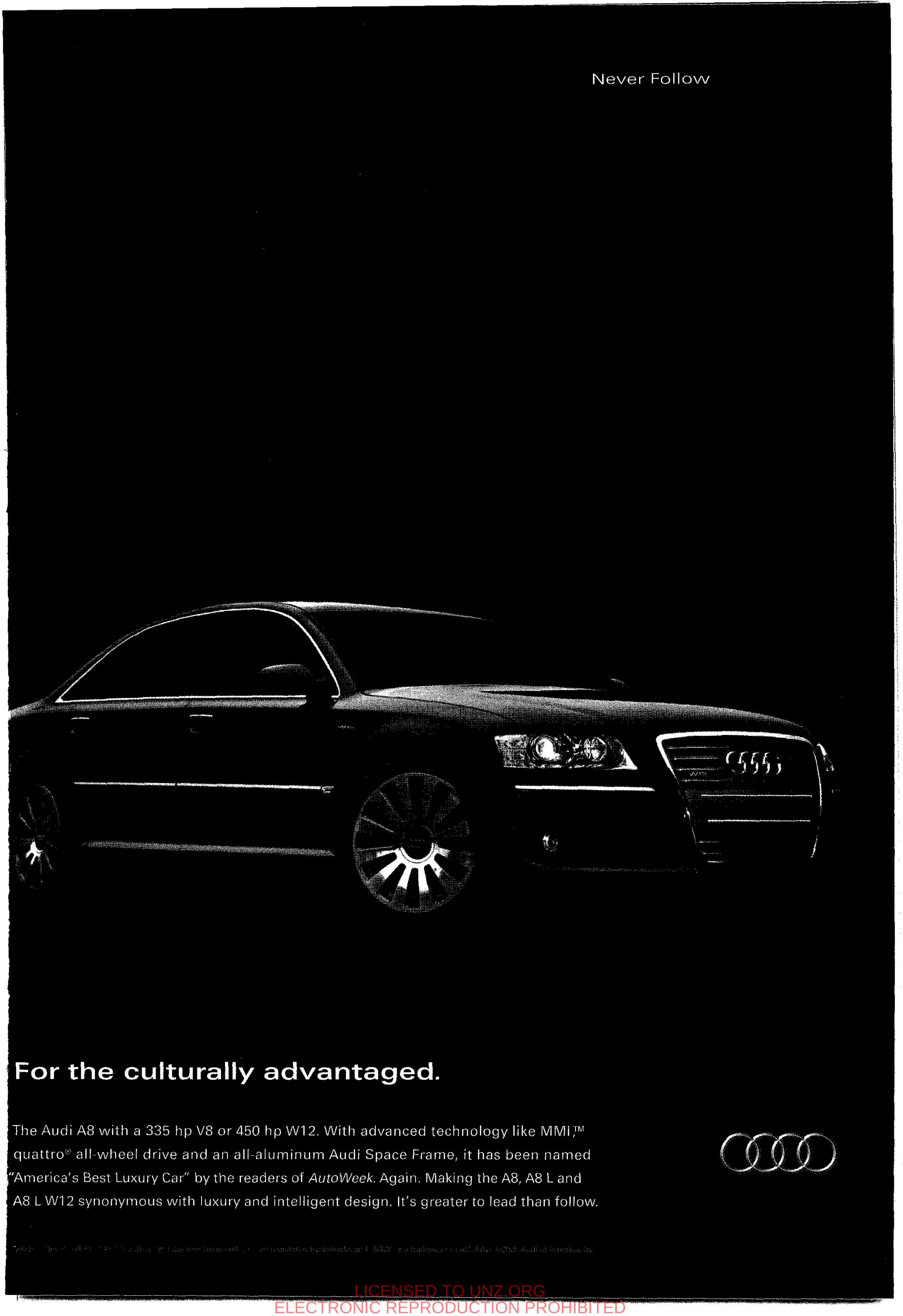
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries,"** a review of recent developments in the study of dinosaurs, provides insight into how the animals moved through their world. Through Jan. 8, 2006. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—Claude Monet did two major stints in London: one as a Franco-Prussian War refugee (1870-71) and, much later, as a famous artist (1899-1901). Results of the latter are on display in **"Monet's London: Artists' Reflections on the Thames 1859-1914,"** including his signature melting views of the Waterloo and Charing Cross Bridges painted from his balcony at the Savoy Hotel and the Houses of Parliament from St. Thomas's Hospital (a vantage point secured for him by the American painter John Singer Sargent). Otherwise, it's everyone's London, from Whistler, represented by his "Thames Set" etchings (1859-1860), to Winslow Homer and Childe Hassam. The American Joseph Pennell (1857-1926) receives ample wall space, alongside stereographic photos of monuments by the famous tidal river and André Derain's Fauvist festival of color "London Bridge" (1906), on loan from the Modern. Through Sept. 4. ♦ Old-fashioned museological Egyptology meets state-of-the-art, user-friendly installation in the permanent exhibition **"Egypt Reborn."** The sunny, spacious galleries present thousands of objects, tracing an evolution from the pre-dynastic period in 3500 B.C. to the era of Roman influence. Wonders include a lavishly painted cartonnage with matching interior coffin lid, a frog-shaped childbirth amulet in brilliant blue faience, and a mummified crocodile from the crocodile cemetery at Kahun. An almost infinite listing of favorites is possible—just don't miss the bird-headed terra-cotta figure thought to be a fertility goddess, one of the oldest, most renowned, and most beautiful artifacts in the world. A new section of the exhibition, a set of thirty old and rare books assembled under the heading "Egypt Through Other Eyes," documents Western fascination with ancient Egypt over the last couple centuries. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Self and Subject,"** a roundup of portraits featuring a veritable *Who's Who* of American outsider artists—or, if you prefer, self-taught or folk artists. What's immediately obvious to the seasoned follower of "mainstream" contemporary art is that these pieces by Grandma Moses, Bill Traylor, Sister Gertrude Morgan, and Henry Darger look uncannily like the doodly, craft-oriented work being churned out by younger artists who've gone through the official channels and paid dearly for their M.F.A.s. Subversive curating? Perhaps. But items like Howard Finster's layered-glass painting "Vision of a Space City," or Ray Materson's baseball cards for Ted Williams, Joe DiMaggio, and Hideki Matsui, embroidered out of threads from unravelled socks, are as weirdly imaginative and wonderful as anything in Chelsea.



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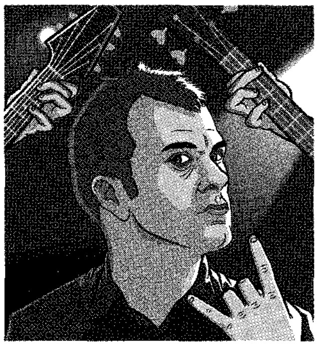
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
LIFE AND DEATH

Life ends, but Napalm Death does not. The venerable British band has released more than a dozen albums since "Scum," in 1987, and is a flag-bearer for the hardy underground genre of heavy metal called "grindcore"—a combination of anarchist-leaning politics, the light-speed pacing of thrash, and an odd singing style known informally as "Cookie Monster." On Napalm Death's records, the drumming is furiously accelerated, guitars are detuned so low that they sound like they're going backward, and the singer Mark (Barney) Greenway makes an incomprehensible sound. Though the band's founding members are gone, the current lineup has been in place, more or less, since 1991; the most recent album is "The Code Is Red ... Long Live the Code." Napalm Death generates a glorious noise onstage, where the band sounds more like an amplified Waterpik than like human beings with instruments. Napalm Death doesn't seem to advocate a style so much as a frequency: a gorgeous mid-range rumble that is soothing despite its obvious fury. The band plays B. B. King's in Times Square on Sept. 6.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*



MICHAEL WELDON

Through Sept. 11. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY
15 W. 16th St. (917-606-8200)—A small but dense collection of memorabilia, **"Greetings from Home: 350 Years of American Jewish Life"** presents nice tidbits like the Chutzpah board game (ca. 1967), a series of Haggadah booklets catering to special-interest constituents from lesbians to G.I.s, and a wonderful short film called "A Pictorial Review of Kolbuszowa." This last was made by an immigrant named Peysakh Zuckerman, who took a newsreel cameraman back to his Polish village in 1929, filmed the smiling graybeards and mugging kids in jaunty black-and-white, and brought the footage back to New York, where he raised money in the Polish Jewish community to send to the folks back in Europe. It's like a flower pressed in a dictionary before the horrors of the war to come. Through Sept. 15. (Open Mondays, 11 to 7, Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Sundays, 11 to 5, and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

CHELSEA ART MUSEUM
556 W. 22nd St. (212-255-0719)—Eighty diminutive etchings from an original 1799 print run of Goya's **"Los Caprichos"** are interspersed with a show of related contemporary work, **"Here Comes the Bogey-Man."** Through Sept. 24. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—It doesn't sound thrilling at first—you can almost hear the cocktail-party bore declaiming "Just one word: textiles." But **"Extreme Textiles: Designing for High Performance"** is actually a fabulous show, quick to stoke imagination and amazement. The wing suits for skydivers are less stylish versions of something Lara Croft might wear, and the fast-deploying webs for riot control are clearly inspired by Spider-Man. The Tumbleweed, a giant computerized beach ball that follows the wind on Mars, periodically deflates to collect data, then reinflates and rolls on. The parade of ingenuity continues with woven structural supports for skyscrapers, "intelligent" ropes that can signal when they're overburdened, racing cars and sailboats with ultralight chassis, and much more. Through Oct. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART
580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—On the museum's tenth anniversary, **"The Dahesh Collection: Celebrating a Decade of Discovery"** honors the academic tradition that ruled supreme before modernism. The galleries are tastefully stuffed with creamy maidens, turbaned Turks, crowded seraglios, champing horses, winsome shepherds, and Pygmalionesque artists at work. Bouguereau, Gérôme, Cabanel, and Doré are the big names, but there are plenty of small names, too, as well as some charmingly unfinished canvases, like Auguste Bonheur's legless cows or Léon Bonnat's faceless Virgin (legs and faces being the difficult bits). Through Sept. 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

ELLIS ISLAND IMMIGRATION MUSEUM
Ellis Island (212-363-3200)—**"Ellis Island Portraits, 1905-20."** Through Sept. 5. (Open daily, 8:30 to 6:15.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—Last chance to catch **"Young America: The Daguerreotypes of Southworth & Hawes,"** one of the season's most unexpectedly ravishing exhibitions. The daguerreotype portraits made in the Boston studio of Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes between 1843 and 1863 are both marvellously luminous and psychologically astute. Their subjects included celebrities like Daniel Webster, Lola Montez, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, but the partners gave the same absorbed, unsentimental attention to a host of regular citizens, many of whom appear to glow under I.C.P.'s pin-spot lighting. Rounding out the show are examples of the studio's wide range: postmortem shots; studies of architecture, statuary, and clouds; and several remarkable views of surgical operations. Through Sept. 4. ♦ **"The Open Book."** Through Sept. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**Joan Snyder** has spent a career navigating the narrows between macho formalism and the more personalized aesthetic edicts of second-wave feminism. More than thirty works here demonstrate those swings, from the gorgeous "Beanfield with Music" (1984), filled with exuberant strokes of bright-green paint, to "Heart On" (1975), a grid overlaid with painted hearts and sewn-together gashes. Her urgent strokes and range of color—from saturated to pastel—recall Joan Mitchell. Snyder's forays into folk art and attempts at inserting history and biography into the mix are intermittently successful. Epics like "Sweet Cathy's Song (For Cathy Elzea)" (1978) pull it off, but others halt her momentum, slowing down the speedy, lyrical rhythm of the best works. Through Oct. 23. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 9, and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—Danny Lyon had already spent four years with a motorcycle gang for his first book, "The Bikeriders," when he set out in 1966 to document **"The Destruction of Lower Manhattan,"** and he took on that project with a similarly tough-minded dedication. The resulting book, first published in 1969, reissued this year, and the basis for this timely exhibition, records some of the sixty acres of nineteenth-century buildings slated for demolition to make way for a new approach to the Brooklyn Bridge and, eventually, the World Trade Center. Although he never gets caught up in the romance of ruins, Lyon is careful to note the architectural history that was being reduced to dust all around him as well as the hardworking men who were doing the job. Through Sept. 18. ♦ **"Timescapes"** compresses four hundred years of New York City history into a twenty-two-minute presentation of morphing maps and archival photographs. It's an absorbing biography of the metropolis, neatly organized into chapters that outline the city's explosion out into its five boroughs, up into skyscrapers, and down into the subway system. Ongoing. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—Despite sincere curatorial effort, **"Jean Hélion,"** a subset of a larger retrospective organized by the Centre Pompidou, can do little to elevate its subject from minor-figure status. Trained as an architectural draftsman, Hélion (1904-87) painted Mondrianish geometric abstractions in the early nineteen-thirties, moving on to organic, rounded forms later in the decade. After a stint as a soldier (and a prisoner of war) in the Second World War, he returned to painting, though he gave up abstraction for still-lifes, street scenes, and nudes. He favored the carnivalesque feel of brutal colors, knotty compositions, and surreal content, but his most pleasing paintings are often the least assuming: a handsomely disarticulated truck in "The Accident" (1979), a cluster of busted chairs painted in 1980. The Academy's addition of a roomful of paintings addressing Hélion's influence on American artists helps find the coherence in a career that spanned continents, styles, decades, and philosophies. Through Oct. 9. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
1 Bowling Green (212-514-3888)—**"George Catlin and His Indian Gallery."** Through Sept. 5. ♦ Some of the exquisitely crafted objects in "First

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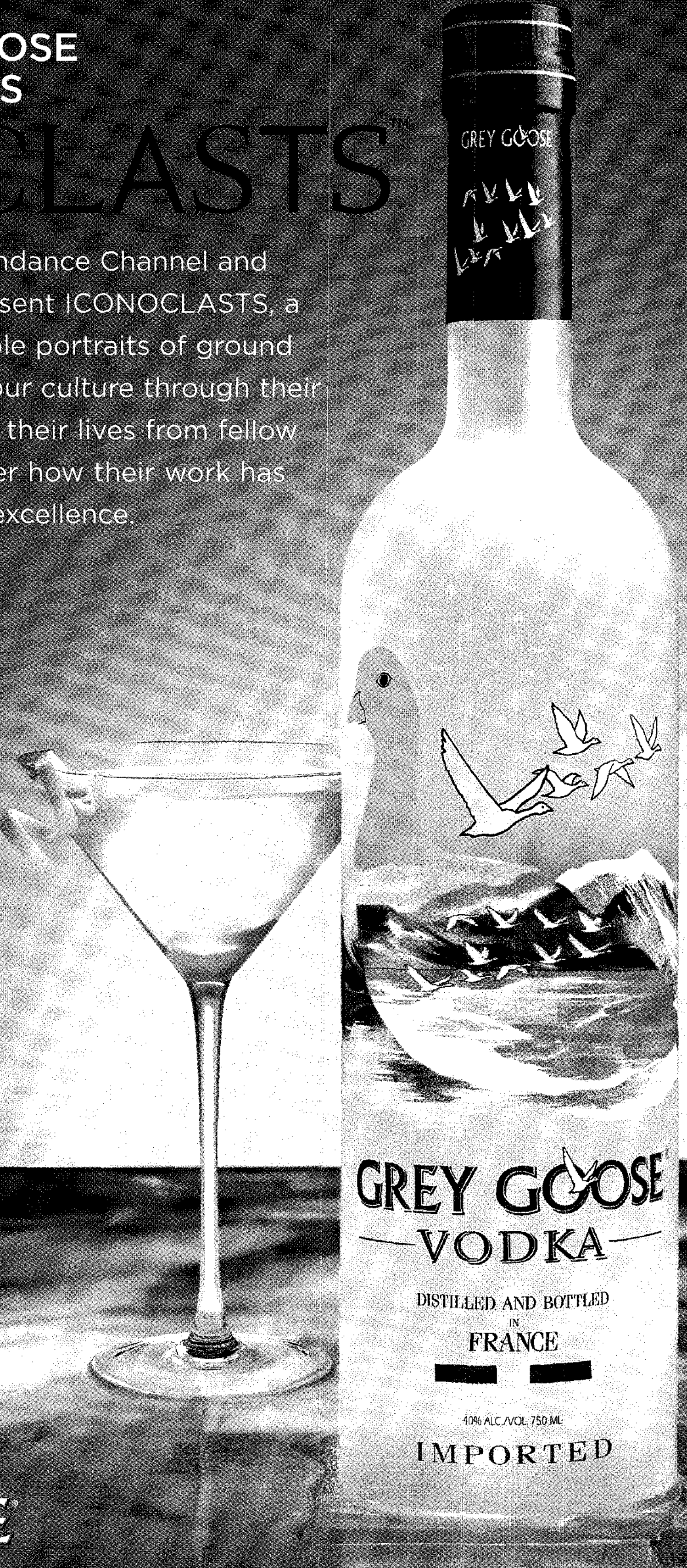
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American Art: The Charles and Valerie Diker Collection of American Indian Art" are easy to identify: beaded clothing, woven baskets, an iron dagger, a baby carrier trimmed with wool and feathers. Others would be mysteries without the wall labels, like an intricately carved ceremonial dance ornament or the ominous-sounding "soul catcher." Standing Bear's watercolor-and-ink-on-cotton depiction circa 1920 of the Battle of Little Big Horn, in which he participated, offers a fuller perspective on a historical moment that is sometimes reduced to cowboys and Indians. Through April 9, 2006. (Open daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEUE GALERIE

1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"War/Hell: Master Prints by Otto Dix and Max Beckmann."** Beckmann's images of the Weimar Republic are like Cubist collages, crowded with figures and depicting horrors such as Rosa Luxemburg's assassination and torturers at work. A group of people identified as "The Ideologists" stand with their eyes turned piously up and their mouths open to speak; the family in "Hunger" says grace over a meal of sardines. Where Beckmann presents types and allegories, Dix's series of fifty etchings, based on four years spent in the trenches, depict the First World War with frightening, documentary, Expressionist gore: skeletons are clad in uniforms, with helmets and gas masks; soldiers on leave consort with prostitutes or weave tipsily through city streets, and one undergoes a gruesome skin graft. The parallels to Goya's "Disasters of War," as well as to contemporary news images, are obvious. Through Sept. 26. (Open Fridays, 11 to 9, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Temporarily situated in the Chelsea Art Museum, 556 W. 22nd St. (212-219-1222)—**"Patty Chang: Shangri-La."** In the 1933 novel "Lost Horizon," James Hilton imagined the mythical Shangri-La, a mountain paradise visited by a marooned British diplomat; six decades later, a dozen towns near China's Tibetan border were vying for the right to use the name to attract tourists. Chang's video documents a visit to the town that won the "Shangri-La War," alternating scraps of mundane workaday life with more magical scenes. To plump up the latter category, Chang hired locals to build a mirrored replica of nearby mountains. The result rests, like a relic from an odd dream, in the back of a pickup truck parked in an adjacent gallery. Through Sept. 10. ♦ Aernout Mik's video installation **"Refraction"** captures the movements of emergency workers and gawkers at a staged bus crash. The deflating sense of urgency—there are no victims—translates into something that feels more flat than frantic or compelling. Through Sept. 10. ♦ **"Rhizome Artbase 101."** Through Sept. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx (718-817-8700)—The vast and lush grounds of the botanical gardens, now deep in their late-summer abundance of daylilies, orchids, roses, and lavender, are twenty-two minutes from Grand Central on the Harlem local line, and **"Waterlilies and Lotus: A Summer Aquatic Exhibition"** is back in the conservatory's courtyard for a third year. Blue-bodied dragonflies light on bulrushes and cattails, and the orange shadows of goldfish cruise by lilies with names like Wood's Blue Goddess, the Star of Siam, and the prickly water lily, whose semi-submerged blossoms recall Audrey II from "Little Shop of Horrors." Through Sept. 18. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—The Society's collection of Hudson River School painters serves as the core of **"Nature and the American Vision,"** but other nineteenth-century landscapes displayed here stretch far beyond the tristate area to Yosemite, Europe, South America, and the Arctic. Hudson River School stalwarts like George Innes, Asher Brown Durand, and Thomas Cole paint great stops on the American Grand Tour (e.g., Lake George, the Catskills, and the Adirondacks), as well as bucolic and majestic views of New York's great river. There are also examples of Staffordshire pottery transfer-printed with scenes of mountains and waterfalls and Wade & Croome's folding twelve-foot "Panorama of the Hudson River" (1847), a wonderfully graphic mapping of the river from the tip of Manhattan to Lansingburgh, just above Troy. Through Feb. 5, 2006. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—Five years ago, the omnibus "Greater New York" filled P.S. 1 from boiler room to rafters with an exhilaratingly fresh cross-section of new work by artists with studios in and around Gotham. Many of those included have gone on to establish enviable careers, and the stakes are high for **"Greater New York 2005,"** a survey of current art life involving six curators and more than a hundred and sixty artists. The good news is that smart, skillful innovation and stubborn insistence on personal vision outrun the inevitable hype. There is forgettable stuff, of course, but every room holds something thought-provoking and new—unlike most comparable tastemaker surveys, this one deserves the "must-see" moniker. Through Sept. 26. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM

12 Fulton St., at Water St. (212-748-8600)—Walt Whitman, as he himself proclaimed, was large; he contained multitudes. **"Walt Whitman and the Promise of America"** accordingly describes a wide slice of life in Brooklyn and Manhattan's Five Points during the later nineteenth century. Treasures include a first edition of "Leaves of Grass," a pair of the poet's large and battered boots, and some eminently touching letters he wrote on behalf of wounded soldiers during his service as a Civil War nurse. There are also ephemera, like a case of movable type such as Walt would have used in his newspapering days; a Civil War-era surgeon's field kit; a screening of "Manhatta," Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's 1921 film juxtaposing images of the modern island with passages from "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"; and period costumes worn by Cameron Diaz and Leonardo DiCaprio in "Gangs of New York." In the Schermerhorn Row Galleries. Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

UKRAINIAN MUSEUM

222 E. 6th St. (212-228-0110)—A supporting player in twentieth-century sculpture is shown to advantage in **"Alexander Archipenko: Vision and Continuity."** The exhibition highlights innovative work by the artist (1887-1964), from the painting-display machine he patented in 1927 (and dedicated to Einstein and Edison) to explorations of newly invented materials like Plexiglas and Formica. The show also includes plenty of the Ukrainian-born artist's better-known bronze nudes and torsos. It's exciting to see a modernist master forge bravely past mid-century and adopt the American fondness for plastics (particularly after he emigrated to the U.S., in 1923), in works like "Cleopatra" (1957), an abstract relief crafted from wood, found objects, and Bakelite. Through Sept. 18. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11:30 to 5.)

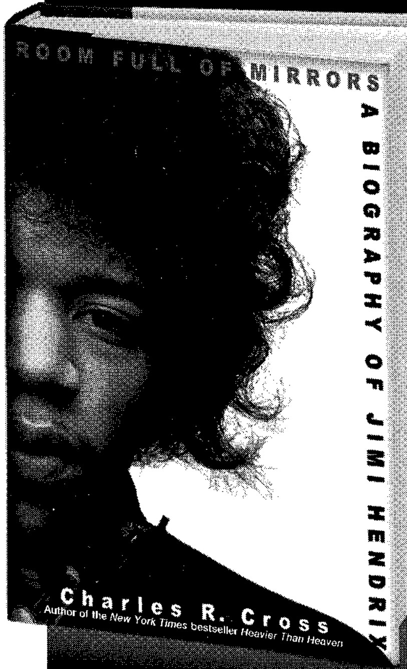
GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

JANET CARDIFF

Cardiff's guided, narrated walk through Central Park is back for a second summer. The artist transforms familiar scenes with scraps of Baudelaire and Kierkegaard, stories of loss and regret,

National Bestseller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snippets of Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridyce," and photographs of old park scenes that are tucked in with the CD player. The walk takes forty-five minutes and ends in a quiet patch of woods near Bethesda Fountain, after which you walk your equipment back to Fifty-ninth Street. Through Sept. 11. (Starts at the kiosk on Central Park South at Sixth Avenue; a credit card or photo I.D. is required to take out the audio equipment. Thursdays through Sundays, 10 to 3:30. For more information or for reservations, call the Public Art Fund at 212-980-3942.)

ERLE LORAN

A five-minute walk from the Cézanne-Pissarro blockbuster at MOMA, a quiet echo of Cézanne's influence can be heard in this small show at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art Research Center. As a student in 1926, Loran (1905-99) won a prize that allowed him to live in France for three years. He went to Cézanne's old studio in Aix-en-Provence and painted small, bright landscapes that reflect the tastes and style of his chosen mentor. He later focussed his energies on scholarship, writing a series of articles that would become "Cézanne's Composition" (Roy Lichtenstein appropriated two schematic diagrams from the book for his own work) and teaching at Berkeley for forty-five years. On view here are paintings and drawings, photographs, manuscripts, and letters to and from correspondents like Clement Greenberg, Richard Diebenkorn, and Clyfford Still. Through Oct. 7. (1285 Sixth Ave. 212-399-5015.)

"BREAKING GROUND"

The Horticultural Society of New York provides one of the city's stranger venues for art viewing, a sort of shabby-genteel library with stained gray carpet and musty bookshelves. The show itself is inspired, however, pairing art by known quantities like Ellsworth Kelly—represented by two lovely lithographs of leaves and a fig branch—with specimens from the emerging crowd. Ethan Vogt's grid of photos showcases suburban shrubbery ranging from scruffy to sculptural to phallic, Kyle Wadsworth's hilarious "Carrying Case for a Domestic Plant" looks like a fibreglass tuba case, and David Melrose's piece—weekly deliveries of bouquets to the curator (Jodie Vicenta Jacobson, also his sweetheart)—is the most candid art-world kiss-up in recent memory. Through Sept. 9. (128 W. 58th St. 212-757-0915, ext. 113.)

"GIRLS ON FILM"

Brazenly staring out at the viewer, Manet's "Olympia" embodied the chutzpah that ushered in modernism. The postmodern women on view here wear a few more layers of history and culture, but they beg the same question: for whom do they pose? The show's conceptual godmother is Cindy Sherman, whose film stills muddy distinctions between viewer, self, and other. Many of the artists, including Martha Rosler, Carol Bove, and Wangechi Mutu, use collaged images to meditate on beauty and female objectification. The title gets literal with Larry Sultan's photos of women on porn-film sets and in the pièce de résistance, Candice Breitz's video series in which she mimics movie scenes originally performed by Julia Roberts, Cameron Diaz, and Jennifer Lopez. Through Sept. 2. (Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677.)

"MEN OF MEXICO"

This survey of male photographers who worked south of the border beginning in the nineteen-twenties includes especially fine examples by the stars of that particular arena, Edward Weston and Manuel Alvarez Bravo. One of Weston's most vivid images is of Tina Modotti stretched out nude on a striped blanket, and another finds Diego Rivera looking rather sombre under a broad-brimmed hat. To complete this historic triangle, Fritz Henle's portrait of Frida Kahlo smolders across the room. Spicing up the mix are several lesser-known photographers, notably Pierre Verger, Gerardo Suter, and Hector Garcia, a student of Bravo's, who contributes a striking shot of José Clemente Orozco that focusses on the painter's gesturing hand and allows the rest to recede into a haze. Through Sept. 17. (Throckmorton, 145 E. 57th St. 212-223-1059.)

"REPEAT PERFORMANCE"

Repetition is the hallmark of minimalism, but it's evident in practically every period of art, from craftsmen's reproductions of religious icons to Warhol's soup cans. Here, repetitive mark-making is executed in baking soda, graphite, and glitter (Tim Nolan's wonderful geometric floor painting "Shift"), beeswax and paraffin (George Stoll's cast tumblers, which make their way into many of this gallery's shows), and staples (Alison Foshee's simple oak, willow, and gingko leaves are "drawn" into the paper with staples). Rounding things out are several of the usual suspects from art's golden age of repetition, the nineteen-sixties: Carl Andre, Walter De Maria, Frank Stella, Agnes Martin, and Eva Hesse. Through Sept. 17. (Anthony Grant, 37 W. 57th St. 212-755-0434.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

WILLIAM EGGLESTON

Eggleston, the Memphis-based maverick known primarily as a pioneering and influential color photographer, has been bringing his early-seventies black-and-white work out of the closet recently. This group of portraits, taken in local dives with a specially rigged view camera and infrared film, feels like a funky, down-home version of Walker Evans's surreptitious shots of New York subway riders. Because many of Eggleston's subjects—good old boys, party girls, truckers, musicians, goofballs—are unaware of his camera, the results are gritty, moody, and pungent. Uncharacteristically large prints undermine the work's intimacy and intensity, but that doesn't dim these flashbacks. Through Sept. 2. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

TABLES FOR TWO

GUSTO

60 Greenwich Ave. (212-924-8000)—During the sweltering summer, nothing sounded more enticing than a drinks menu that included the words "sparkling" and "fizz," as Gusto's does, with its half dozen sparkling wines, prosecco cocktails (which work better as intermezzi than as an evening opener), and—get this—Ramos gin fizz. Turns out gin and milk *do* go together. (Turns out vodka and rosemary, in the Martini-like Rosmarino, do not.) A delightfully peppery freshness comes from a little plate of cut radishes, laced with anchovy purée and olive oil, that appears with the drinks.

The cover of the menu features a grainy, stylized image of Anita Ekberg from "La Dolce Vita," but the place evokes neither the scarcities nor the excesses of postwar Rome, except for the lovely, very long mirrored bar. An insanely large and unattractive modern chandelier hangs in the front room like a rhinestone-encrusted spaceship, and the metal room dividers with geometric cutouts call to mind suburban Chinese restaurants of the nineteen-sixties. Two warnings: don't fall down the yawning staircase in the middle of the front room, and don't sit at the oval tables in the back room, which are the wrong shape for the banquettes around them.

Gusto opened in the spring, and its chef, Jody Williams, late of Tappo and Giorgione, has set out to cover the waterfront—and Piedmont, Liguria, and other regions of Italy as well. Two good starters, chilled green-tomato soup and a crunchy, lightly lemony fritto misto, picked up where the radishes left off but were followed by much less snappy main courses. The wide-ranging choices feel overly strenuous, as if Williams were literally spinning plates, and the skittishness extends to the wait staff, many of whom don't appear to be comfortable talking about food. The rack of lamb was nothing special; neither were Sicilian meatballs, with pine nuts and raisins. Tagliatelle alla Bolognese happens to be one of the tastiest things here, while Baccalà alla Vesuviana, house-cured salt cod in a tomato sauce with orange zest and chiles, is a nice discovery. The desserts are run of the mill, and there are, oddly, eight teas. Eight teas, in an Italian restaurant? Gusto has a chef; now it needs an editor. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $14-$34.)

—*Nancy Franklin*

"WORKS ON PAPER"

A straightforward summer show of eight European male painters, each represented by work that displays his trademark gestures. Georg Baselitz's black-on-white-ground pastel-and-gouache figure from 1973 is drawn, predictably, upside down. Jörg Immendorff's self-deprecating figures show the artist as a hapless clown surrounded by painterly accoutrements like a palette, but also by a dog lifting its leg. An untitled collage by Sigmar Polke sports his signature newspaper Benday dots, while another distorts a face in the mode of a Picasso collage. Markus Lüpertz, Peter Doig, Per Kirkeby, Eugène Leroy, and A. R. Penck follow suit with works that are predictably Expressionist and abstract. Through Sept. 10. (Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623.)

Short List

JAMES TURRELL: Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through Sept. 24. **PETER WEGNER:** Lever House, 390 Park Ave., at 53rd St. Through Sept. 4. **"ALONG THE WAY: MTA ARTS FOR TRANSIT":** UBS, 1285 Sixth Ave. 212-713-2885. Through Sept. 9.

JUSTIN LOWE

It's not the Summer of Love, but something like it as Lowe turns his reading-room project into a collaborative, communal affair. Lowe's contribution is a nook with pillows and a squishy platform made of dime-store paperbacks packed in tightly, edges up. Painted, printed, and drawn "wallpaper" squares by several dozen other artists (Jutta Koether, Benjamin Butler, and Rirkrit Tiravanija among them) reinterpret the interior of Neil Young's 1974 album "On the Beach." Peter Coffin's vaselike sculpture smokes when watered, intensifying the opium-den effect. Jen DeNike's "Shipwreck" video, with a panty-clad woman prostrate in ocean surf, is intermittently lulling and disturbing. New additions arrive nearly daily, making the installation a mutable, freewheeling social experiment. Through Sept. 24. (Printed Matter, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-925-0325.)

TAM OCHIAI

Klee and Dubuffet borrowed liberally from the art of children, recognizing them as the great primitives in our midst who shun proportion, perspective, and other "rules." Ochiai takes it a step further, collaborating with thirty-two children between the ages of two and twelve. The

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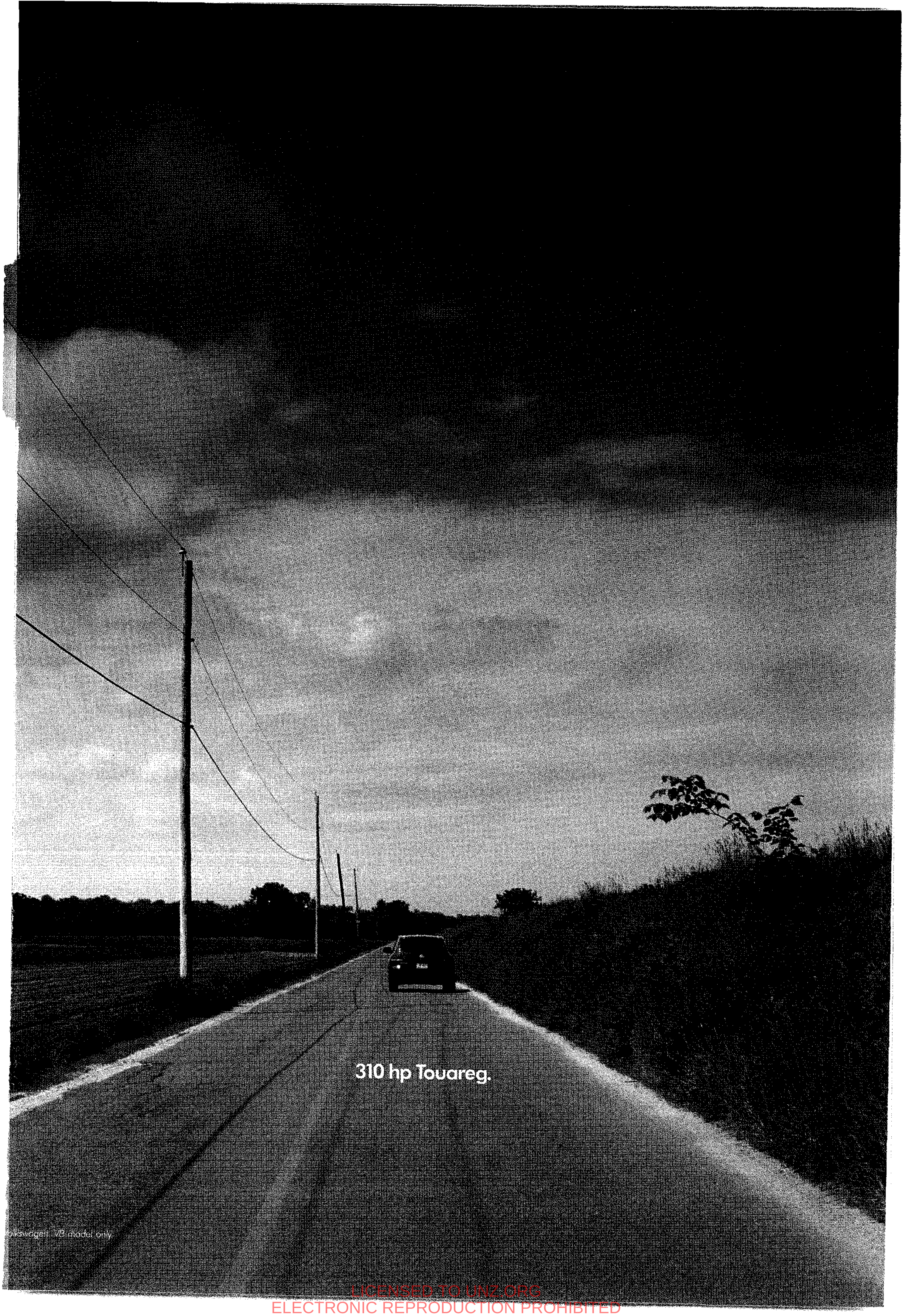
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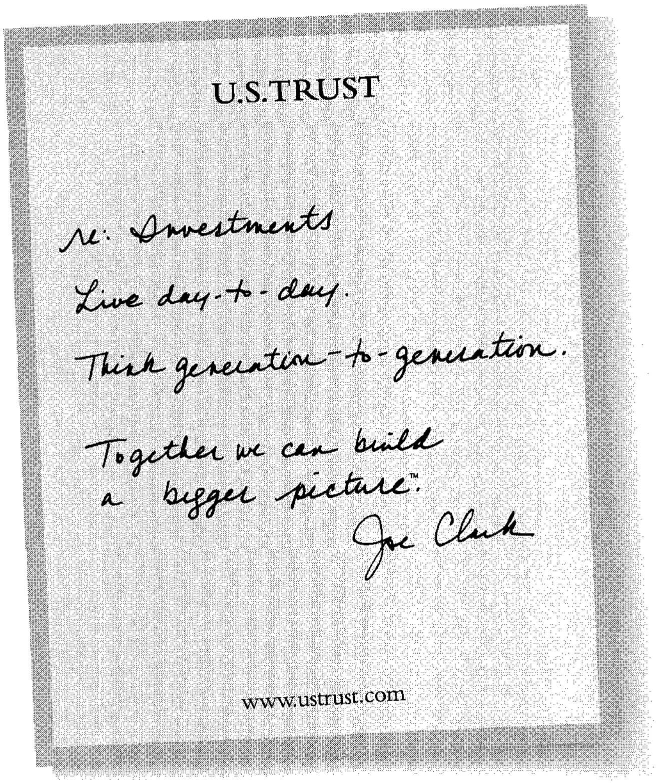
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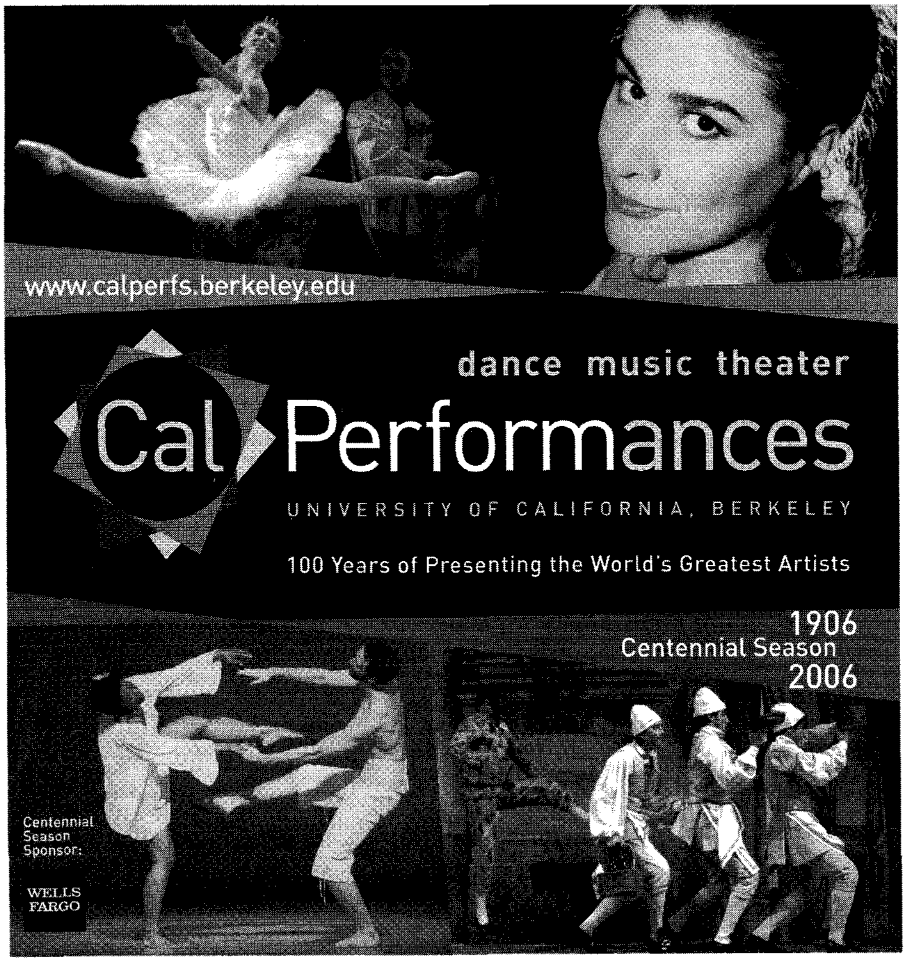
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idea was to get them to copy his drawings, but many went their own way, scrawling cats, monsters, flags, human figures, and indecipherable abstractions in colored pencil on the white walls, generally without regard to scale or tidiness. Ochiai's own work doesn't look much different. A grid of sixty small drawings, mostly of girls, and a "work table" scattered with pencils and drawn fragments shows his debt to the kiddie aesthetic. Through Sept. 24. (Team, 527 W. 26th St. 212-279-9219.)

BILL OWENS
Owens, who is best known for his 1973 book "Suburbia," is easy to shrug off as a clever, anecdotal photographer in the tradition of Elliot Erwitt. But this excellent survey of work mostly from the seventies emphasizes Owens's sharper edge and restores the bite to his satirical view of the American Dream, California-subdivision style. Opening with a wall of gun-toting children and adults, the show touches down at Altamont (where Hells Angels are beating someone to the ground before a horrified crowd), a women's bathroom (where a girl leans toward a mirror, coke spoon poised), a busy hot tub, a prom, a strip club, and various grill-friendly back yards. Banal may not be beautiful, but it ages well. Through Sept. 24. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

HIROKI OTSUKA
An illustrator known for his contributions to *manga* magazines (*Hi-5*, *Badi*, *Rabumani*, and *Erotics*) and his own graphic novels makes the switch from comics to canvas in this début solo show. Otsuka recycles motifs dear to the *otaku* set—sexy waifs, unsettling undercurrents of violence—and treads in the footsteps of artists like Raymond Pettibon, whose ink-on-white-ground images are similarly accompanied by vague existential musings (and, incidentally, owe plenty to such traditional Japanese graphics as ukiyo-e). Two particularly explicit works—one is titled "Addicted to Sex"—are painted onto the curved undersides of skateboards. Along with the T-shirts, belts, and comics for sale, they push the populist youth quotient through the roof. Through Sept. 4. (Stay Gold, 451 Grand St. 718-599-7778.)

"NIMBI AND PENUMBRAE"
Rain-bearing clouds, the aura of light around saints, and the space between perfect light and shadow are referenced by the title, and the work follows the same spectre-lit path. Tina West's murky photographs of horses recall early efforts in that medium—think Talbot rather than Muybridge—while Valérie Hallier's more up-to-date, smeary C-prints cribbed from video stills capture faceless youths doing things at night they probably shouldn't. Liza McConnell wins the prize for conceptual oddness with a back-room installation of plastic joint-compound buckets with holes cut in the side and magnifying glasses attached. Close up, the dried compound inside the illuminated buckets looks like a lunar landscape or something growing under a scientist's microscope. Through Sept. 18. (Dumbo Arts Center, 30 Washington St. 718-694-0831.)

"PRECIOUS MOMENTS"
Bits of mass Americana are examined from the safe bohemian remove of Williamsburg. Brian Belott collects snapshots from thrift shops and the trash and displays them on shelves arranged by popular theme: sunrise/sunset, the television, open sky with a smidgen of horizon line. Mass-market photo studios aided Liz Rywelski in her Cindy Shermanesque project of photographing herself in blandly stereotypical guises (career woman, girl next door, young mother). Shana Moulton's installation and video featuring a cheap electric blanket with a Navajo motif and self-help text highlights how spirituality is watered down and marketed in the aisles of big-box stores. Through Sept. 10. (Joymore, 236 Grand St. 646-270-0376.)

DANCE

"LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS"
The festival's free plein-air dance concerts conclude with three concerts on Aug. 31. In the Josie Robertson Plaza, **FLY Dance Company**, from Houston, Texas, performs hip-hop moves to classical, jazz, pop, and other sounds at 10:30 A.M. and 6. And at 8, in the Damrosch Park Band Shell, the hyperkinetic, loose-jointed members of the **KanKouran West African Dance Company** get moving as soon as the drums start rolling. Limber, sweaty, and superhumanly fast, the dancers sway through sections of "Circle of Praise," by Dr. Sherrill Berryman-Johnson, Ronald K. Brown, and Assane Konte, the company's Senegalese founder, who directs. (For more information, call 212-875-5766, or visit www.lincolncenter.org for full festival schedule. No tickets necessary.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Virtuosos from the conductorless chamber ensemble offer music by two friends—Brahms (the First Serenade) and Dvořák (the Notturno)—in a lunchtime concert at Trinity Church. (Broadway at Wall St. Sept. 1 at 1. No tickets required.)

BARGEMUSIC
The young Swedish pianist Niklas Sivelöv is in residence at the barge this weekend. Sept. 1-2 at 7:30: A solo recital of music by Haydn (the Sonata No. 47 in B Minor), Schumann (the Sonata No. 2 in G Minor), Scriabin, and Ginastera. ♦ Sept. 3 at 7:30 and Sept. 4 at 4: Beethoven's two Op. 70 piano trios (including the "Ghost," in D Major) surround Sivelöv's "New York Trio," in a program given with the violinist Mark Peskanov and the cellist Sophie Shao. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MUSIC AT ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL
Ross Wood, the associate organist of Boston's Episcopal Church of the Advent, continues the cathedral's long tradition of free organ recitals with a program of music by Bach (the Prelude and Fugue in A Major, BWV 536), Louis Vierne (movements from the Second and Fourth Symphonies), and Louis Marchland. (Fifth Ave. at 50th St. Sept. 4 at 4:30. No tickets required.)

OUT OF TOWN

BERKSHIRE OPERA
Sari Gruber, the first-prize winner of this year's Naumburg International Vocal Competition, leads the cast of Donizetti's **"L'Elisir d'Amore,"** the company's final production of the season. Kathleen Kelly conducts. (Koussevitzky Arts Center, Berkshire Community College, Pittsfield, Mass. 413-442-0099. Aug. 31 and Sept. 2 at 8.)

SKANEATELES FESTIVAL
Twenty-five years ago, David and Louise Robinson decided that the Finger Lakes region needed some first-rate summer chamber music. Their festival, named for the lake on which their house sits (concerts are occasionally offered on the spacious porch), has maintained a small-town feel even while attracting world-class talent. Sept. 1 at 8: The violinist Hilary Hahn, a beloved figure at the festival who has played there since the age of twelve, joins several esteemed colleagues (including the violist Lesley Robertson and the pianist Natalie Zhu) in works by Piazzolla, Debussy ("Danse Sacrée et Danse Profane," for harp and strings), Beethoven, and Enescu (the Violin Sonata No. 3). ♦ Sept. 2 at 8: Robertson joins with the pianist Elinor Freer, the cellist David Ying, and other musicians for chamber music by Lutoslawski, Bizet (a suite from "Carmen"), and Brahms (the Piano Quintet in F Minor). ♦ Sept. 3 at 8: In the final concert of the summer, Hahn joins the festival orchestra in Sibelius's Violin Concerto; Peter Bay, the conductor, also leads music by Ravel ("Le Tombeau de Couperin") and Dvořák (the "Czech Suite"). (Skaneateles, N.Y. 315-685-7418. For more information, see www.skanfest.org.)

CONCERTS AT TANNERY POND
Christian Steiner's musical fiefdom, ensconced in an acoustically splendid Shaker tannery, continues its summer season into September. The next concert is offered by Spoleto Festival Chamber Music, in which the veteran pianist Charles Wadsworth teams up with a group of outstanding younger musicians (such as the violinist Chee Yun and the clarinettist Todd Palmer); they perform works by Saint-Saëns, Schumann, Bizet (the charming "Jeux d'Enfants," for piano duet), and Smetana (the Piano Trio in G Minor). (Darrow School, Route 20, New Lebanon, N.Y. 888-820-1696. Sept. 3 at 8.)

WINDHAM CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
The renowned violinist Elmar Oliveira appears on the festival's final program of the season, performing music by Corelli, Elgar (the Violin Sonata in A Minor, Op. 82), Prokofiev (the Violin Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 80), and Ravel ("Tzigane"), with the pianist Robert Koenig. (Windham Performing Arts Center, Windham, N.Y. 518-734-6378. Sept. 3 at 8.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
Northern Connecticut's string-quartet shrine ends its season with two concerts by the dashing Shanghai String Quartet; both honor the late Ruth Laredo, who had been originally scheduled to appear with them. Sept. 3 at 8: Works by Yi-Wen Jiang (the group's second violinist), Brahms, and Mozart (the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major, with Rieko Aizawa). ♦ Sept. 4 at 3: Mozart's "Dissonant" Quartet, Schumann's String Quartet in A Minor, and Chausson's Concerto for Violin, String Quartet, and Piano, a longtime favorite at Music Mountain—with the violinist Arnold Steinhardt as the special guest. (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

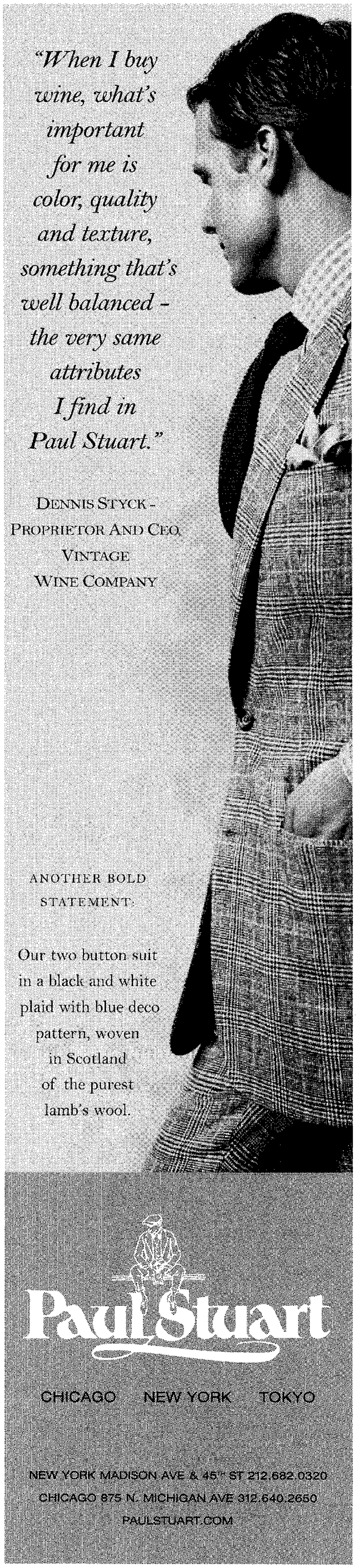
MAVERICK CONCERTS
For the final concert of its ninetieth season, the festival returns to the theme with which it started: a celebration of the extraordinary flutist and conductor Georges Barrère, one of its first directors. The flutist Marya Martin joins three exceptional strings—the violinist Livia Sohn, the violist Geoff Nuttall (taking a break from his duties as first violin of the St. Lawrence Quartet), and the cellist Alexis Pia Gerlach—for a piquant program of trios by Beethoven, Reger, and Dohnányi, along with Mozart's Flute Quartet No. 1. (Woodstock, N.Y. Sept. 4 at 3. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

SOUTH MOUNTAIN CONCERTS
As most of the Northeast's chamber-music festivals wind down, this longtime outfit (founded by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, better known for her work at the Library of Congress) begins. The season is short but high class, and is largely sold out on subscription. The second concert is an afternoon with the Borromeo String Quartet, a still-young American group notable for its polished sound and majestic phrasing. David Shifrin, the rich-toned and eminent clarinettist, joins them in a program of music by Stravinsky, Mozart (the Clarinet Quintet), and Dvořák (the valedictory Quartet in G Major, Op. 106). (Route 7, Pittsfield, Mass. Sept. 4 at 3. Remaining tickets at the door. For more information, see www.southmountainconcerts.org.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE CONSTANT GARDENER
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Aug. 31. (In wide release.)

GAMES OF LOVE AND CHANCE
A drama about a teen-ager living in a Parisian housing project who joins his school's drama group to get closer to the girl playing the lead in a Marivaux play. Directed by Abdellatif Kechiche. In French. Opening Aug. 31. (IFC Center.)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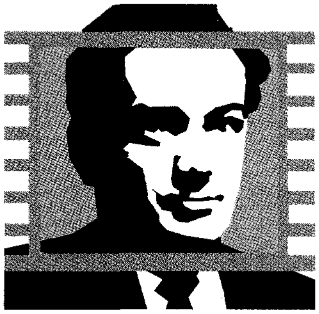
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
GREAT SCOT

Those who can, do. And sometimes they teach as well. After working as a screenwriter in England, the Scottish director Alexander Mackendrick made three mordantly funny but affectionate Ealing Studios comedies, "Whisky Galore" (also known as "Tight Little Island") in 1949, "The Man in the White Suit" in 1951, and in 1955 "The Ladykillers," which would later be remade by the Coen brothers. Burt Lancaster then brought Mackendrick to Hollywood for "Sweet Smell of Success" (1957), a film that is now considered the definitive portrait of fifties New York at four in the morning. After a few more movies—the last was "Don't Make Waves," starring Tony Curtis—Mackendrick abruptly quit directing and, for more than twenty years, taught at the California Institute of the Arts. In a retrospective that begins on Sept. 5 and runs through the end of the month, the Museum of Modern Art is showing all nine of his features; Farrar, Straus & Giroux has also brought together Mackendrick's classroom notes and lectures on script construction and directing in the extraordinarily useful volume "On Film-Making."

—*David Denby*



MARGARET CHO: ASSASSIN
Cho's latest concert film, from her "State of Emergency" tour. Opening Sept. 2. (Quad Cinema.)

A SOUND OF THUNDER
Peter Hyams directed this thriller, based on a Ray Bradbury story, about a travel agency that specializes in time-travel hunting trips in the prehistoric age. With Ben Kingsley and Edward Burns. Opening Sept. 2. (In wide release.)

THREE DANCING SLAVES
A drama directed by Gaël Morel ("Wild Reeds"), about three brothers trying to make sense of their lives after their mother dies. In French. Opening Sept. 2. (Angelika Film Center.)

TRANSPORTER 2
In this action sequel, a retired Special Forces operative now working as a chauffeur must find the kidnapper of his client's son. With Jason Statham, Matthew Modine, and Amber Valletta. Opening Sept. 2. (In wide release.)

UNDERCLASSMAN
Marcos Siega ("Pretty Persuasion") directed this comedy, about a bike cop (Nick Cannon) who gets his first assignment, as a detective at an élite prep school. Opening Sept. 2. (In wide release.)

WILLIAM EGGLESTON IN THE REAL WORLD
A documentary by Michael Almereyda, about the life of the art photographer at the age of sixty-five. Opening Aug. 31. (Film Forum.)

NOW PLAYING

THE ARISTOCRATS
In this one-of-a-kind documentary, made by Paul Provenza and Penn Jillette (of the Penn & Teller magic act), some of the greatest comics of the day take turns telling a simple dirty joke from vaudeville days. The joke is about a show-business family, and it features a short setup, a two-word punch line, and an infinitely expandable middle section detailing the special nature of the family's act. In that redolent middle, the comics exercise their virtuosity at excremental, incestuous, and bestial themes. The joke is told tenderly by Paul Reiser, urbanely by Martin Mull, seductively by the sublime Sarah Silverman, gravely and with much loving, superfluous detail by George Carlin, and shrilly, with an emotion bordering on hysteria, by the inspired pixie Gilbert Gottfried. Comics normally smothered under the blanket of family entertainment—Whoopi Goldberg, Jason Alexander, Bob Saget—come alive in wild-eyed bursts of obscene invention. After a few variations, the words no longer shock. The familiar obsessions, as they come off here, are so gleefully extravagant—another organ, another fluid, another outrage!—that one experiences them as a desire to embrace life more fully, or at least to embrace telling more fully.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/29/05.) (In wide release.)

ASYLUM
A disappointment, at once silly and chilly, from David Mackenzie, who made "Young Adam" with Ewan McGregor. The wildness that flared around that movie has abated with ominous speed. Natasha Richardson, who also executive produced the new picture, stars as Stella Raphael, who, with her young son, accompanies her husband, Max (Hugh Bonneville), to his new position at an asylum. There they find, in ascending order of strangeness, Dr. Cleave (Ian McKellen) and his brooding patient Edgar (Marton Csokas), whose career includes stints first as a sculptor and then as a homicidal maniac. His sexual adhesion to Stella is perhaps the least surprising development in any movie this year; the whole film, indeed, rejoices in the predictable, right down to the ruined tower where the lovers meet. McKellen enjoys the nonsense for what it is, whereas Richardson treats it with a vitreous solemnity. The result, with its constrained, Britain-bashing archness, could have been made a third of a century ago.—*Anthony Lane* (8/22/05) (In wide release.)

BARRY LYNDON
Thackeray wrote a skittish, fast-moving parody of romantic, sentimental writing. It was about the adventures of an Irish knave who used British hypocrisy for leverage. However, it must have been Barry's ruthless pursuit of wealth and social position rather than his spirit that attracted Stanley Kubrick. His images are fastidiously delicate in the inexpressive, peculiarly chilly manner of the English painters of the period—the mid-eighteenth century—and it's an ice pack of a movie, a masterpiece in every insignificant detail. Kubrick suppresses most of the active elements that make movies pleasurable. The film says that people are disgusting but things are lovely. And a narrator (Michael Hordern) tells you what's going to happen before you see it. It's a coffee-table movie; the stately tour of European high life is like a three-hour slide show for art-history majors. With Ryan O'Neal and Marisa Berenson. Released in 1975.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Aug. 31.)

THE BAXTER
In this genial but neutered independent comedy by the young writer-director Michael Showalter, who also stars, the title refers to the loser in love. Showalter plays Elliot Sherman, a repressed Brooklyn C.P.A., who meets two women—a high-powered socialite (Elizabeth Banks) and a quirky rural misfit (Michelle Williams)—and spends the rest of the film stumbling into the right choice. Showalter, a member of the former comedy troupe the State, writes funny and smartly constructed scenes, but as a director he offers, for better and for worse, a comic actors' showcase. He himself is unsure whether to be Jack Lemmon or John Cleese, but the sublime Michelle Williams holds the screen magnetically with her dewy-eyed channelling of the young Shirley MacLaine. The film is knowingly modelled on such Hollywood romances as "The Apartment," and Showalter also borrows their constraints: there's no sex, politics, worldly context, or ethnic diversity. In the classic comedies, sparks flew although the friction stayed offscreen. Here there's no friction at all.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

BROKEN FLOWERS
Jim Jarmusch linking up with Bill Murray is a case of Mr. Cool meeting Mr. Cool, and the resulting silences are deafening. Murray plays Don Johnston, who is allegedly an aging Don Juan. But Murray is so quiet and self-contained that he seems to want nothing. When he sets out on the road to visit the women he was dating twenty years ago, one of whom may have conceived a son with him, the movie turns into a kind of elegant alienated travelogue. Some of the actresses Murray encounters do extremely well in their brief appearances, especially Sharon Stone, as a hard-luck blonde who doesn't demand too much from life, and Jessica Lange, as an iron-willed fraud who "talks to animals." Jarmusch is good at the evanescent emotions of lost love and unfulfilled lives, but the movie is all gesture and unspoken longing. It's all of a piece, and well observed, but it's an art object without the energy or courage to be a work of art.—*D.D.* (8/8 & 15/05) (In wide release.)

THE BROTHERS GRIMM
Terry Gilliam had a good idea—to re-create the origins of the fairy-tale-spinning Brothers Grimm—but, as it turns out, the movie is yet another noisy, hyperbolic, digital farce, with people jumping in and out of the frame and turning into corpses and then coming back to life, trees endlessly moving around the woods, and much general tumult, and the movie quickly becomes tedious. As the more intellectual and scholarly Jacob Grimm, Heath Ledger is often charming, but Matt Damon, as Wilhelm Grimm, wearing Napoleonic-era locks that make his features look as bulbous as those of a carved puppet (if that was the point, it doesn't work to the actor's advantage), never finds anything to play. Gilliam, of course, has a wild visual imagination and an exuberant sense of character, but the comedy is so frenetic it quickly cancels itself out. With Lena Headey as a fearless maiden, Peter Stormare and Jonathan Pryce trying hard to be grotesque, and lots of crones, misshapen villagers holding pitchforks, and the like.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

KIM DEMARCO

CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

In Tim Burton's adaptation of the book by Roald Dahl, Johnny Depp plays Willy Wonka and Freddie Highmore plays Charlie, who, having found one of five golden tickets hidden in a chocolate bar, wins a tour of Wonka's chocolate factory. Depp, as Wonka, dresses like Oscar Wilde, smiles like Michael Jackson, enunciates like Tootsie, and wears rubbery purple gloves to keep away the germs—and is far more of a child than the actual children around him. The movie is surprisingly unwild, though often astounding—Burton summons succulent and strange details such as a thunderous, cocoa-hued waterfall and bulging pink sheep that are sheared for their fleeces of cotton candy—but the eye, no less than the palate, is at first dizzied, then acclimatized, then jaded, and, finally, semi-sickened. To chide a movie that oozes so many gags may sound churlish, but you can't help feeling that a fantasist as accomplished as Burton can manage this kind of project with his eyes shut.—*A.L.* (7/25/05) (In wide release.)

THE 40-YEAR-OLD VIRGIN

In the beginning of Judd Apatow's sweet-as-candy comedy, Andy (Steve Carell) is not just a virgin. He's a complete nerd, a boy in a man's body who lives alone, has hundreds of mint-condition action figures, and rides his bicycle to his job at an electronics store. When the (relatively) cool guys at the store need another player for their poker game, Andy joins them, and ends up boasting awkwardly—and hilariously—about all the women he's been with, unwittingly revealing his humiliating secret. As the guys theorize about how Andy should go about getting himself deflowered, Andy falls for Trish (the excellent Catherine Keener). The story is simple, and, in spite of all the crudity, soft. The riskiness is in the sophisticated performances. Carell is empathetic and profoundly funny, and several members of the supporting ensemble stand out—especially Romany Malco as Jay, the philosopher-ladies' man, and Jane Lynch as Andy's boss, who makes it known, with a serenade, that she is willing to be of service.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

FOUR BROTHERS

John Singleton directed this ensemble piece about four brothers out to avenge the death of their foster mother. It's an entertaining exercise in style: specifically, an urban Western, in which the spirit of Wyatt Earp hovers nearby as the men go about finding the killers. The movie is utterly preposterous—the script is cobbled together from "Oprah" moments and tough gangsta dramas—but there's plenty of gritty interplay between the brothers (played by Mark Wahlberg, Tyrese Gibson, Garrett Hedlund, and Outkast's André Benjamin) that's believable. Singleton moves the film along swiftly and unapologetically, creating a chaotic and graphic revenge drama that's almost purely visceral.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

GRIZZLY MAN

The indefatigable Werner Herzog has made a brilliant documentary about an American saint and fool—Timothy Treadwell, a failed actor and California surfer who fell in love with the grizzly bears in Alaska and who spent a dozen summers with the bears, usually alone and always unarmed. All was well until October, 2003, when Treadwell and his girlfriend, Amie Huguenard, were attacked and devoured by a hungry long-nosed grizzly. When the hundred hours of video footage that Treadwell shot in the last five years of his excursions fell into Herzog's hands, the German filmmaker interviewed Treadwell's friends and ex-girlfriends, naturalists, and park-service officers and wove the footage into a startling meditation on nature and innocence. Herzog is properly respectful of Treadwell, but he interprets the American as an impatient misfit who relieved his misanthropy with neurotic protestations of love in the wilderness. Treadwell doesn't seem to understand that death is at the center of any ecological balance, but Herzog, it turns out, sees nothing but death in nature. Neither man, it seems, is willing to admit that a bear is a bear is a bear.—*D.D.* (8/8 & 15/05) (In wide release.)

THE HIRED HAND

Peter Fonda's directorial début, from 1971, is a lyrical flight—ninety minutes of impassioned imagery about marital and fraternal loyalty, manhood, and (what's rarer for a Western) womanhood, too. It picks up a pair of decent, affable drifters (Fonda and Warren Oates), just when Fonda has sickened of the winding trail that was supposed to lead to California and has decided to go home to the wife and daughter he abandoned seven years before. After a horse thief kills their young third partner, Oates chooses to settle down for a spell, too. Oates never gave a subtler, warmer performance than as a man who unexpectedly takes to domesticity. Always robust and true, Verna Bloom, as Fonda's wife, conveys an extraordinary aura of sexual mortification. Fonda, touching as an actor, proves astonishing as a director, using a fluid, tactile style to conjure a life lived close to the elements and to sudden death. The way he stages violence ramifies shock into diverse stunned emotions: awe, grief, remorse, even a troubled satisfaction. And the cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond operates at the summit of his powers: the final shot of a barn has the quiet confidence of a classic still-life.—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; Sept. 2.)

HUSTLE & FLOW

As DJay, a low-rent South Memphis pimp, Terrence Howard speaks in a soft, smoky voice that trails off into nowhere. His talkative hustler has the obscure, ruminative wit of an old bluesman; he turns his come-ons and rants into a sullen art. The movie asks whether that particular art is convertible yet again—whether DJay's hustle can be converted into the thumping flow of the Memphis-style rap known as crunk. Written and directed by Craig Brewer, this movie unfolds in the kind of awful heat that wilts any effort aimed at more than mere survival. Against all odds, DJay and his friends create a song. With Ludacris as a Memphis rapper returning to his home town after having made his fortune in the music business; Taryn Manning, Taraji P. Henson, and Paula Jai Parker as DJay's women; Anthony Anderson as a sound engineer; and D. J. Qualls as a skinny white guy who makes his living servicing concession machines but knows how to lay down crunk's bass-heavy tracks.—*D.D.* (7/11/05) (In wide release.)

JUNEBUG

Meet the in-laws, North Carolina style. Phil Morrison's remarkably assured directorial début, about a cosmopolitan art dealer (Embeth Davidtz) who travels with her new husband (Alessandro Nivola) to his family home, is snarkily funny and unexpectedly moving. Set over a long weekend, the story (by Angus MacLachlan) focusses on the interaction between Davidtz's somewhat floundering character and the members of her husband's complex family. There's an unhurried attention to detail that Morrison brings to the story which allows the crisp dialogue and deep characterizations room to breathe. The various narrative strands—the domineering mother (Celia Weston) who favors one son over another, the chatterbox sister-in-law (a luminous Amy Adams) who hungers for connection—come together to form a contemplative picture of a surprisingly fragile Southern family.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

MARCH OF THE PENGUINS

The French wildlife filmmaker Luc Jacquet spent more than a year chronicling an emperor-penguin colony in Antarctica, and what he discovered was a touching, self-sacrificing ritual of parenthood. Trekking for miles through stunning ice-castle landscapes, Jacquet frames the penguins' mating cycle—from courtship through the birth and rearing of their newborns—as a severe and forbidding ballet that demonstrates the true meaning of survival and determination. Narrated by Morgan Freeman.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

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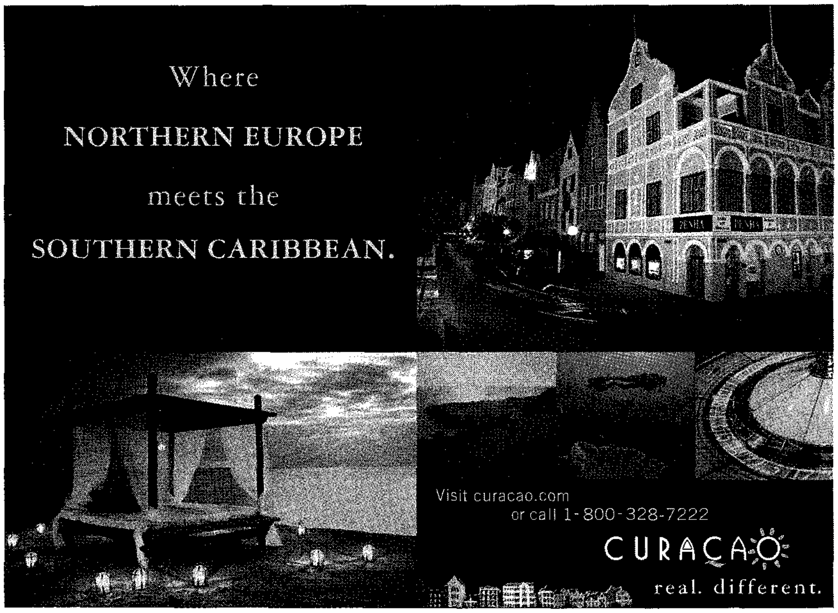

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PANDORA AND THE FLYING DUTCHMAN
Certifiably one of a kind. Albert Lewin, who produced, directed, and wrote the story and screenplay, shows more visual feeling than common sense. James Mason, in his gloomily romantic period, is, literally, the doomed sailor, and Ava Gardner (looking unspeakably luscious) is an American playgirl in evening clothes who wanders through exotic, poetic landscapes before sacrificing herself to save him. Lewin's direction is static, yet his staging is so luxuriantly mad that it's easy to get fixated on what, if anything, he could have had in mind. Sally Bowles might have called it divinely incoherent—it's as nutty-fruity as another Gardner film, "The Barefoot Contessa," but without as much talk. Released in 1951.—*P.K.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Sept. 2-3.)

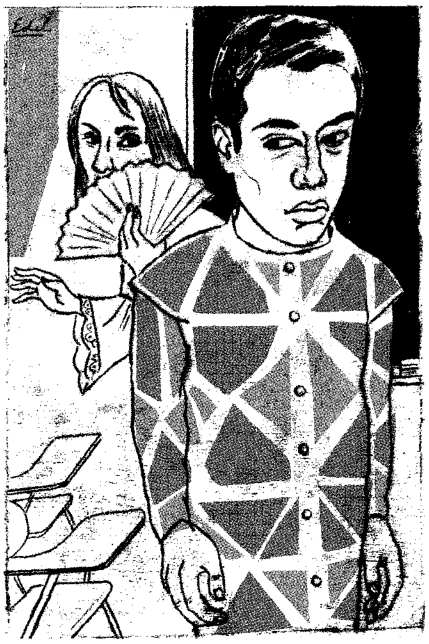
PRETTY PERSUASION
Thin, nasty, and not always as funny as you want it to be, this satire of American values takes off from the mean-girls high-school genre and scores some points. The heroine, Kimberly Joyce (Evan Rachel Wood), a fifteen-year-old vamp with superfluous or missing parents (James Woods has some funny bits as her anti-Semitic dad), has streaks of perception and decency, but mainly she's a ruthless mover who wants celebrity and power. Wood, pert in a school uniform and pale with a bit of rose in her cheeks, does flip cynicism with such precise, easy rhythms and such obvious pleasure in naughtiness that she's impossible to dislike. The director, Marcos Siega, frames her performance within calm, formally composed images—no rapid movement, no weird angles or rushed cutting. "Pretty Persuasion" is often as still as a painting—one of its most profane scenes is lit and framed like an Old Master. The rest of the cast is negligible.—*D.D.* (8/29/05) (In wide release.)

RED EYE
A late-night flight is given the shudders in Wes Craven's new thriller. Rachel McAdams stars as a more-than-efficient reservations manager who flirts with a stranger (Cillian Murphy), whom she soon finds out is a terrorist assassin. McAdams, who has an energetic, no-nonsense screen presence, and the icily handsome, charismatically wolfish Murphy are well matched, and their early scenes together pop with crowd-pleasing flair. As the two fall deeper into the movie's cat-and-mouse game, Craven's brisk pacing gives the film a roller-coaster quality that jumps the plot holes and keeps the suspense intact.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

SKY HIGH
One of Disney's biggest former child stars, Kurt Russell (who began his career there in 1966 with the Boy Scout comedy "Follow Me, Boys!") returns to his roots in this delightful family film. Showing a warmth and humor that's over-the-top engaging, Russell plays the father of a superhero family whose son (a lively Michael Angarano) is having a tough time in a high school that caters to superpowered teens. The film, though filled with special effects, is a cheerful throwback to the simple stories of earlier Disney fare—a friendly, brightly lit coming-of-age story that teaches life lessons in building confidence and trusting oneself.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

2046
The latest and grandest work from Wong Kar-wai has the form of a sequel to "In the Mood for Love" but is also an amplification of its rhapsodic themes. Tony Leung plays Chow, a writer who moves into a small Hong Kong hotel, befriends the daughter of the owner (Faye Wong), and gradually works his way through a number of equally beautiful women, including a neighboring call girl (Zhang Ziyi) and a gambler with a black glove (Gong Li). "Her past was like the glove she always wore—a mystery," the narrator confides, and therein lies both the enchantment and the niggle of the film. Everything here is made mysterious under compulsion; the gorgeousness of the photography, like the ceaseless throb of the score, throws a veil over each detail, until not just the characters but the settings, too, begin to merge into one another. There are surges into science fiction (courtesy of a story that Chow is writing), but they seem no less anesthetized than the smoky world of his girlfriends. What they see in the guy is anybody's guess. In Cantonese, Japanese, and Mandarin.—*A.L.* (8/22/05) (In wide release.)

WEDDING CRASHERS
Jeremy (Vince Vaughn) and John (Owen Wilson), a pair of divorce mediators, spend their summer weekends rolling up to the weddings of people they don't know and becoming the life and soul of the party. The director, David Dobkin, and the writers, Steve Faber and Bob Fisher, kick off with a hectic montage of good will, and the first twenty minutes are rabid with simple pleasure. Then Jeremy and John hit a swish society affair, in which the Treasury Secretary, William Cleary (Christopher Walken), is marrying off one of his daughters, leaving two more (Rachel McAdams and Isla Fisher) to be ogled by our heroes, whereupon the fizz—and the generosity—starts to leak away. Thank heaven for the leading men—especially Vaughn, a hopped-up Gary Cooper who shoots his mouth off with such scattershot brio that he flubs the occasional word, or picks an overheated one ("Erroneous! Erroneous!"), or forgets to pause for breath. This is a dumb-ass picture about dumb-ass men. Still, sometimes ten per cent of your brain is just enough.—*A.L.* (7/25/05) (In wide release.)



The French drama "Games of Love and Chance" opens August 31.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

YOJIMBO
Akira Kurosawa's boisterous, exuberant comedy-satire about violence, from 1961, with Toshiro Mifune as an unemployed samurai. When our Westerner came into town, although his own past was often shady, he picked the *right* side—the farmers against the gamblers and the cattle thieves. This samurai walks into a town divided by two rival merchants quarrelling over a gambling concession, each supporting a gang of killers. He has his special skills and the remnants of a code of behavior, but to whom can he give his allegiance? He hires out to each and systematically eliminates both. We might expect violence carried to extremity to be sickening; Kurosawa, in a triumph of bravura technique, makes it explosively comic and exhilarating. There is so much displacement of the usual movie conventions that we don't have the time or inclination to ask why we are enjoying the action; we respond kinesthetically. One of the rare Japanese films that is both great and funny to American audiences. (Sergio Leone made his own version of it, "A Fistful of Dollars.") In Japanese.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Aug. 31.)

Also Playing

THE CAVE: In wide release. **THE MEMORY OF A KILLER:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema. **MURDERBALL:** Sunshine Cinema. **REEL PARADISE:** IFC Center. **THE SKELETON KEY:** In wide release. **TONY TAKITANI:** Quad Cinema.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—New York theatrical première. Aug. 31-Sept. 1 at 7 and 9: "We Jam Econo: The Story of the Minutemen" (2005, Tim Irwin). ♦ "New Filmmakers." Aug. 31 at 8: "Runaways" (2005, Brent Bambic). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Sept. 2 at 8: "Wavelength" (1967, Michael Snow). ♦ Sept. 3 at 6:30: "<—>" (1969, Snow). ♦ Sept. 3 at 8: "Flaming Creatures" (1963, Jack Smith). ♦ Sept. 4 at 6: "Carriage Trade" (1971, Warren Sonbert). ♦ Sept. 4 at 7:30: "À Propos de Nice" (1930, Jean Vigo; in French), "Taris, Roi de l'Eau" (1931, Vigo; in French), and "Zéro de Conduite" (1933, Vigo; in French). ♦ Special screening. Sept. 3-4 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Not on the Lips" (2003, Alain Resnais; in French).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"BAMcinématek Favorites." Aug. 31 at 7: "Barry Lyndon" (†). ♦ Caribbean Diaspora Festival. Sept. 1 at 4:30 and 9:30 and Sept. 2 at 9:30: "Justice" (2004, Jeanne-Marie Almonor and John Shulman). ♦ Sept. 1-2 at 6:50: "The Agronomist" (2003, Jonathan Demme). ♦ Sept. 2 at 4:30: "Of Gods and Men" (2002, Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire; in French and Haitian Creole). ♦ Sept. 3 at 2 and 6:50 and Sept. 5 at 4:30: "Santo Domingo Blues" (2003, Alex Wolfe; in Spanish and English). ♦ Sept. 3 at 4:30 and Sept. 4 at 2 and 6:50: "Young Rebels" (2005, Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck). ♦ Sept. 3-4 at 9:15 and Sept. 5 at 6:50: "One Love" (2003, Rick Elgood and Don Letts). ♦ Sept. 4 at 4:30 and Sept. 5 at 2 and 9:15: "Calypso Dreams" (2004, Geoffrey Dunn and Michael Horne). ♦ Special free screening. Sept. 6 at 7:30: "Bullets in the Hood: A Bed-Stuy Story" (2005, Terrence Fisher and Daniel Howard).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"Summer Samurai." All films are in Japanese. Aug. 31 at 1:10, 5:20, and 9:30: "Yojimbo" (†). ♦ Aug. 31 at 3:20 and 7:30: "Sanjuro" (1962, Akira Kurosawa). ♦ Sept. 1-3 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Kill!" (1968, Kihachi Okamoto). ♦ Sept. 4-6 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Harakiri" (1962, Masaki Kobayashi).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Weekend Classics." Sept. 2-5 at noon: "Rivers and Tides" (2001, Thomas Riedelsheimer). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Sept. 2-4: "Taxi Driver" (1976, Martin Scorsese).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Anime!!" All films are in Japanese, except where noted. Aug. 31 at 6: "Gigantor," episode one (1963, Yonehiko Watanabe), "Mobile Suit Gundam," episode one (1979, Yoshiyuki Tomino; in English), and "Fooly Cooly," episode one (2000, Tsurumaki Kazuya). ♦ Sept. 1-2 at 6, Sept. 3 at 1:30, and Sept. 4 at 5: "Voices of a Distant Star" (2002, Makoto Shinkai) and "Place Promised in Our Earlier Days" (2004, Shinkai). ♦ Sept. 1 at 8:30 and Sept. 3 at 7:45: "Interstella 5555, The 5tory of the 5ecret 5tar 5ystem" (2003, Kazuhisa Takenochi and Leiji

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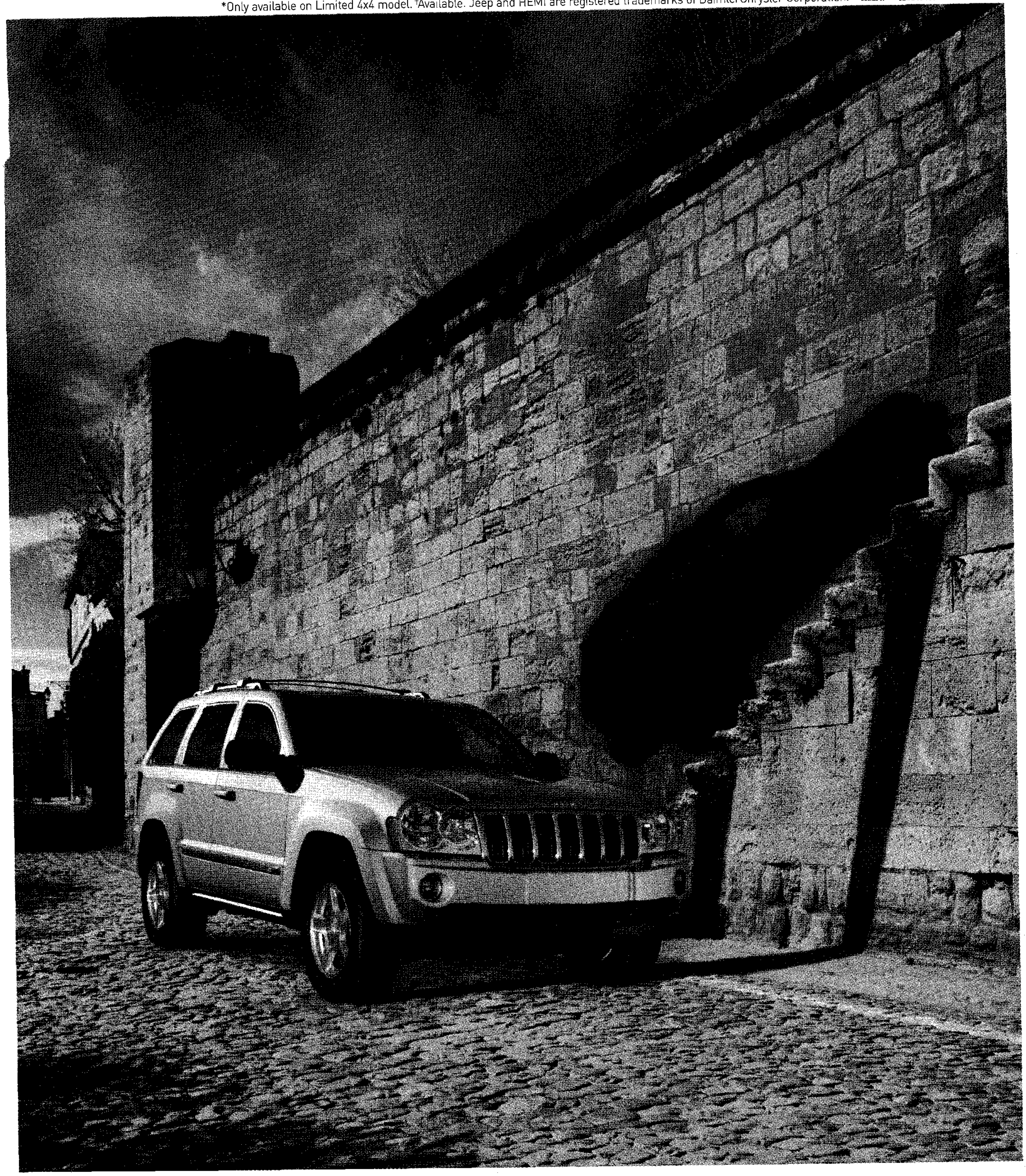

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Matsumoto). ♦ Sept. 2 at 8:30, Sept. 3 at 9:15, Sept. 4 at 2, and Sept. 5 at 5:45: "Mind Game" (2004, Masaaki Yuasa). ♦ Sept. 3 at 4: "Robot Carnival" (1987, Atsuko Fukushima). ♦ Sept. 3 at 6: "Ghost in the Shell" (1995, Mamoru Oshii). ♦ Sept. 5 at 8: "Akira" (1988, Katsuhiro Ôtomo). ♦ "New Work/New Acquisitions." Aug. 31 at 6: "The Himmler Project" (2000, Romuald Karmakar; in German). ♦ Aug. 31 at 8: "An Estranged Paradise" (1997-2002, Yang Fudong; in Mandarin). ♦ "112 Years of Cinema." Sept. 2 at 6: "The Hired Hand" (†). ♦ Sept. 2 at 8: "The Gauntlet" (1977, Clint Eastwood). ♦ Sept. 3 at 2: "The Cooler" (2003, Wayne Kramer). ♦ Sept. 3 at 4: "China Gate" (1957, Samuel Fuller). ♦ Sept. 3 at 6:15 and Sept. 5 at 6: "Breakdown" (1983, Kathryn Bigelow and Monty Montgomery). ♦ Sept. 4 at 2: "Clueless" (1995, Amy Heckerling). ♦ Sept. 4 at 5: "Barcelona" (1994, Whit Stillman). ♦ Through Sept. 30: "Alexander Mackendrick: Auteur and Academic." Sept. 5 at 8: "Whisky Galore," a.k.a. "Tight Little Island" (1949).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Black Light: Films from the African Diaspora." Sept. 2 at 7:30 and 9:30: "Favela Rising" (2005, Jeff Zimbalist and Matt Mochary; in Portuguese). ♦ Repertory nights. Sept. 3 at 2 and 7:30 and Sept. 4 at 2 and 6:30: "Breathless" (1960, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ Sept. 3-4 at 4: "Contempt" (1963, Godard; in French).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Sept. 2-4: "Back to the Future" (1985, Robert Zemeckis).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"I Love to Singa: Cartoon Musicals." Aug. 31 at 1: "Musical Mice," a program of short cartoons (1931-37). ♦ Aug. 31 at 3:30: " 'Sillies' and Other Symphonies," a program of short cartoons. ♦ Aug. 31 at 6: "Iwerks by Design," a program of short cartoons (1928-37). ♦ Aug. 31 at 8:30: "The MGM (Cartoon) Musical," a program of short cartoons (1934-54). ♦ "Nicolas Roeg: Master of Ambiguity." Sept. 1 at 1:15 and 6:15: "Don't Look Now" (1973). ♦ Sept. 1 at 3:30 and 8:30: "Bad Timing: A Sensual Obsession" (1980). ♦ "Technicolor Dreaming." Sept. 2 at 2 and Sept. 3 at 7: "Pandora and the Flying Dutchman" (†). ♦ Sept. 2 at 4:30 and Sept. 4 at 2: "Written on the Wind" (1956, Douglas Sirk). ♦ Sept. 2 at 6:30 and Sept. 3 at 2: "The Birds" (1963, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Sept. 2 at 9 and Sept. 3 at 4:30: "Moulin Rouge" (1952, John Huston). ♦ Sept. 3 at 9:30 and Sept. 4 at 4: "This Island Earth" (1955, Joseph M. Newman). ♦ Sept. 4 at 6 and Sept. 5 at 2: "Singin' in the Rain" (1952, Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly). ♦ Sept. 4 at 8:15 and Sept. 5 at 6:15: "The Red and the Black" (1954, Claude Autant-Lara). ♦ Sept. 5 at 4:15 and 8:30: "Horror of Dracula" (1958, Terence Fisher). ♦ "Talking About Tom Schiller." Sept. 6 at 8: "Nothing Lasts Forever" (1984, Tom Schiller).

READINGS AND TALKS

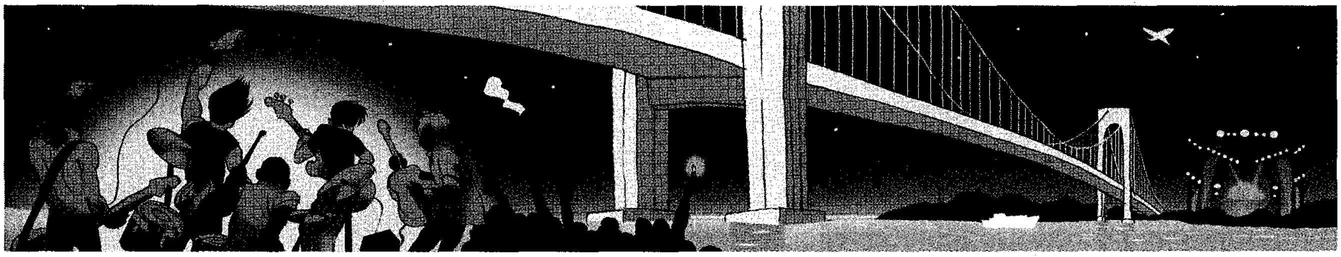
HELENE STAPINSKI
Stapinski, a journalist and the author of the memoir "Five-Finger Discount," reads from "Baby Plays Around," her account of two years in the early nineties when she was newly married and decided to join a rock band on the Lower East Side. (Barnes & Noble, 4 Astor Pl. No tickets necessary. Sept. 1 at 7.)

THOMAS BELLER
The writer offers selections from his latest collection of essays, "How to Be a Man: Scenes from a Protracted Boyhood." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 1 at 7:30.)

EXPLORERS CLUB
Ian Desai is a New York native, a recent graduate of the University of Chicago, and a Rhodes Scholar. In 2001, he followed the mythical path of Jason and the Argonauts along the south shore of the Black Sea and into the Republic of Georgia. On Sept. 6 at 6:30 he talks about his journey. (46 E. 70th St. 212-628-8383.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BEACH TENNIS
Beach tennis sounds like the premise for a bad video game (there is, in fact, a game by that name, the goal of which seems to be getting the female players to take their tops off), but it is also a new sport, played on a beach volleyball court, using regular tennis racquets and regular tennis balls. Marc Altheim, a real-estate developer from Long Island who encountered it two years ago while on vacation in Aruba, brought it to this country with the help of his uncle, Fredric Finkelstein, an advertising executive. The two formed an association, and have sponsored tournaments around the country this summer. Their efforts come to a head at the first U.S. Beach Tennis Open, in Long Beach on Sept. 3-4. The purse totals fifteen thousand dollars. Not bad for a barefoot day's work. (For more information, visit www.beachtennisusa.net.)



TOMER HANUKA

ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE WITH A TWIST

Sept. 20-24

Mabou Mines celebrates its thirty-fifth anniversary with the help of the puppeteer Basil Twist and the Japanese composer Ushio Torikai, in a multimedia work called "Red Beads," inspired by a Siberian folktale about an adolescent girl's relationship with her mother. The performance, which takes place at the Skirball Center, combines aerial acrobatics, contact improvisation, wind puppetry, and ancient Japanese dance. (212-992-8484.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC FROM RUSSIA

Sept. 29

Carnegie Hall's opening-night gala features the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, conducted by Yuri Temirkanov; Yefim Bronfman will perform Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3. (212-247-7800.)

NIGHT LIFE BRIDGE AND TUNNEL

Oct. 1-2

"Across the Narrows" is a two-day, two-borough, dual-stadium rock festival with an awe-inspiring lineup. The Pixies and Gang of Four are among the acts on opening day at Keyspan Park, in Brooklyn. On the other side of New York Harbor, the Killers, the New York Dolls, and British Sea Power play the Richmond County Bank Ballpark, in Staten Island. The second-day highlights include Beck and Belle and Sebastian in Brooklyn and Oasis, Jet, Doves, and the Lemonheads in Staten Island. (212-307-7171.)

MOVIES JORDAN RULES

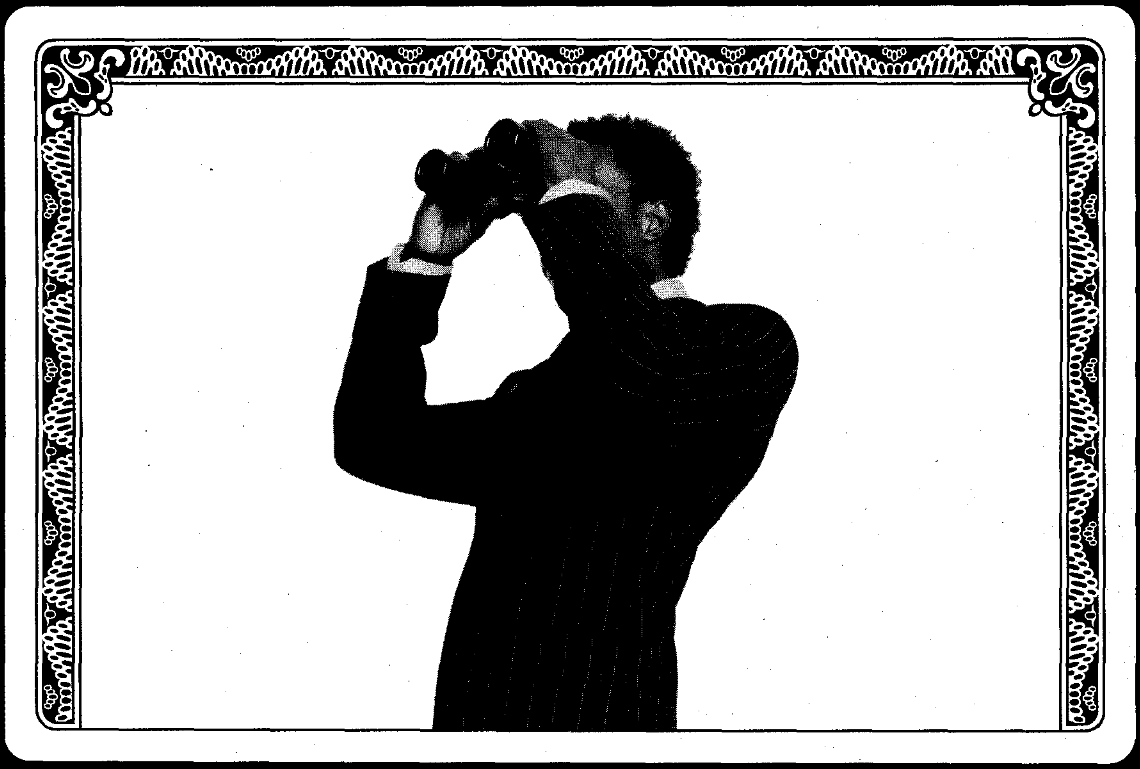
Oct. 1-2

The New York Film Festival features Neil Jordan's comic drama "Breakfast on Pluto," which stars Cillian Murphy as a young man who leaves a small Irish town to become a transvestite prostitute in London. Jordan will also speak, in a separate event. (www.filmlinc.com.)

ART GRAHAM AT STONE

Oct. 22-Dec. 22

The Allan Stone gallery's presentation of "John Graham: Sum Qui Sum" will be the most comprehensive show of the Russian-born artist's work in twenty years. The paintings will be bolstered by a selection of Graham's lesser-known erotic drawings. (212-987-4997.)



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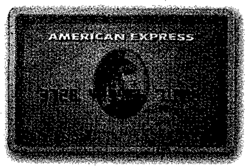

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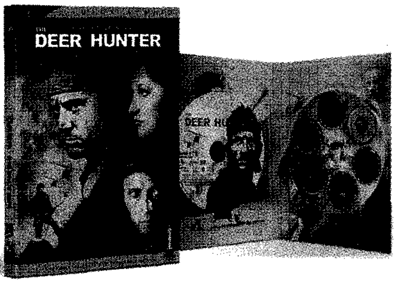

Gregory Peck
To Kill A Mockingbird

This September 6, starting with *To Kill A Mockingbird, The Deer Hunter,* and *The Sting,* Universal Studios Home Entertainment will begin releasing limited-edition DVDs of our era's most enduring films. Each will be released in a two-disc set, and will be digitally remastered for optimal picture and sound. Legacy Series DVDs will also contain an unprecedented number of bonus features—including archival footage, new material, and specially designed packaging.

The **To Kill A Mockingbird** set pays tribute to the Academy Award®-winning adaptation of Harper Lee's novel with new bonus features: Gregory Peck's Academy Award acceptance speech, Cecilia Peck's heartwarming farewell to her father given at the Academy Awards in celebration of his life, and a documentary on Peck, produced by Cecilia Peck and directed by Academy Award-winner Barbara Kopple.

Collectors will want to own **The Deer Hunter**, a searing look at the devastating toll of the Vietnam War on three close friends. The Legacy Series set will pay homage to this Academy Award-winning drama with all-new bonus material, including deleted scenes, and feature commentary with noted cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond and film journalist Bob Fisher.

Academy Award winners Robert Redford and Paul Newman teamed up for one of the greatest con artist-heist movies ever made, **The Sting**. This fast-paced, cinematic delight will be available in Dolby Digital 5.1 and DTS 5.1 Surround Sound for the first time. Fans will be even more delighted by the bonus materials, including an in-depth retrospective of this Best Picture Oscar®-winner.

Universal plans to release as many as forty classic and contemporary films in limited-edition DVD sets. From *Duck Soup* to *Psycho*, the titles will be recognized for the unique, defining aspects that made them unforgettable experiences for audiences everywhere.

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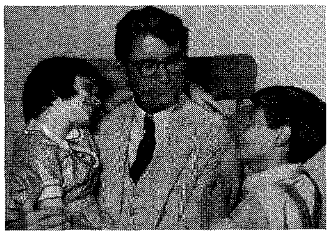

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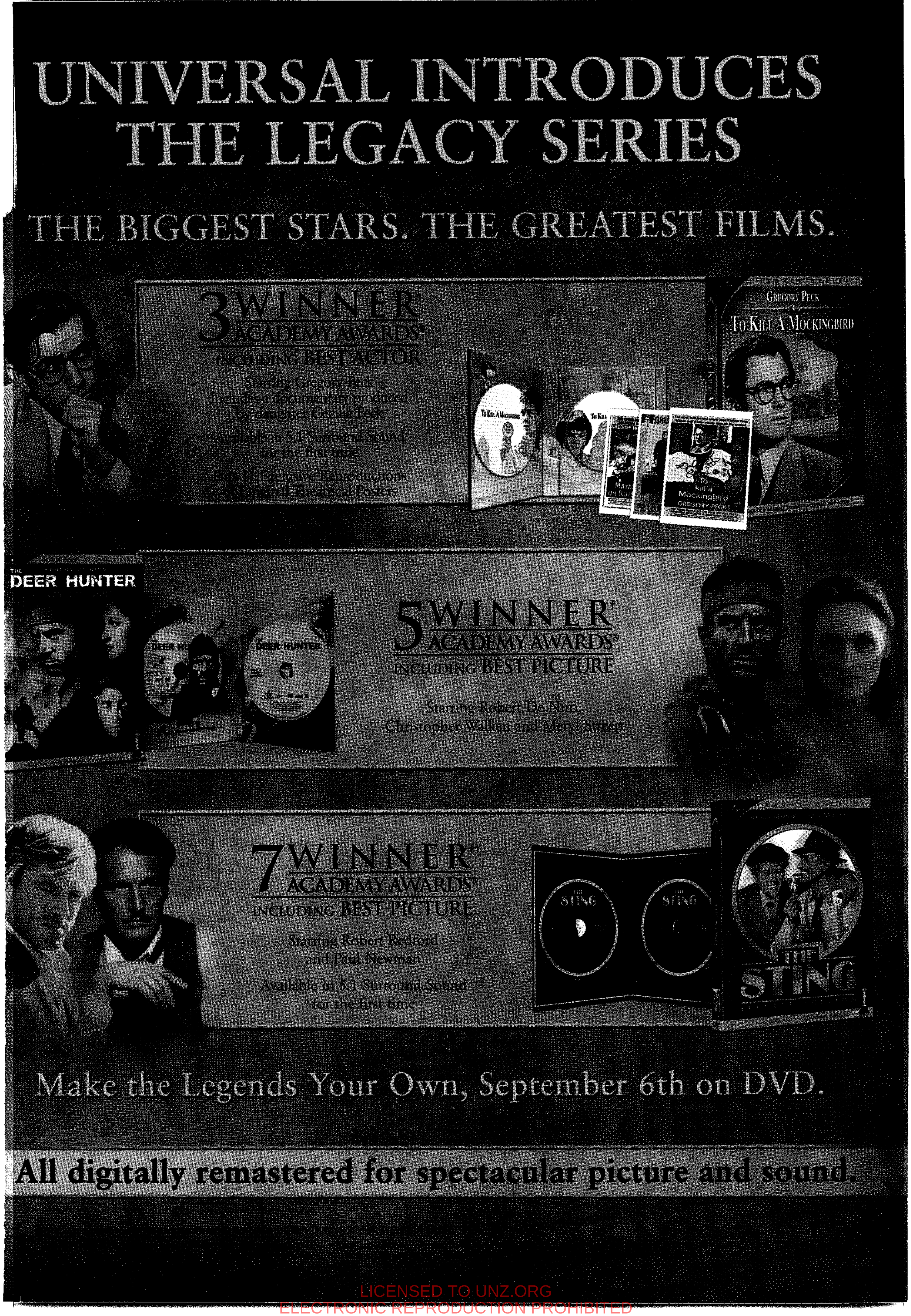
Gregory Peck
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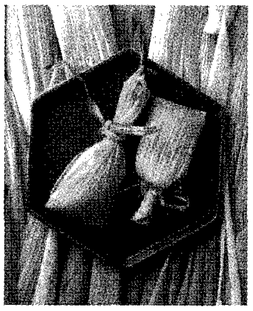
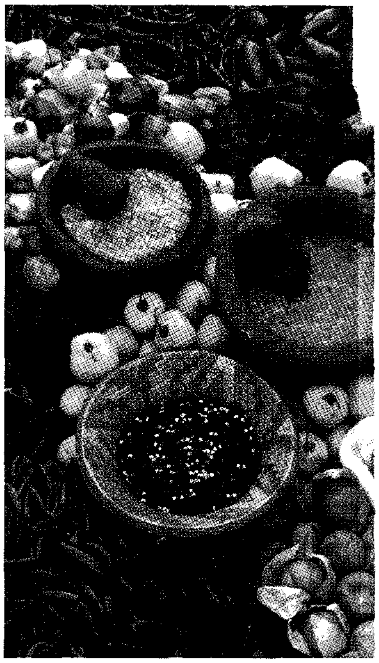
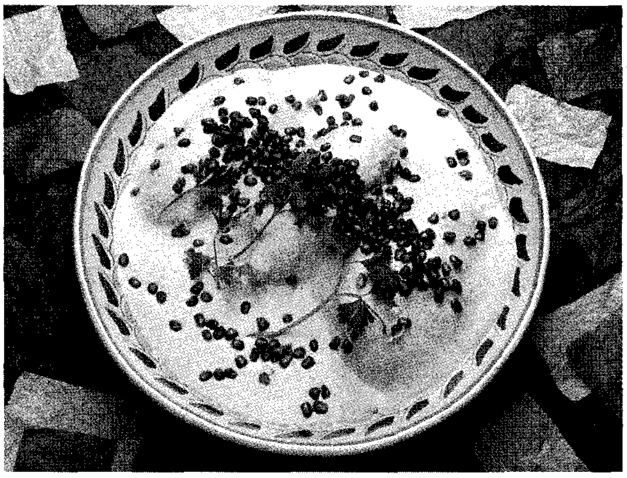




East of Mexico city, travelers come to **Puebla** for the architecture in its Centro Histórico, with its more than a thousand colonial buildings. Here, mole, the national dish of Mexico has its roots. But be sure to also try signature dish, *chiles en nogada*—stuffed *poblano* chile peppers in a white walnut sauce. Leave room for a trip to Calle 6 Oriente, also known as *La Calle de los Dulces* (Street of Candies). The traditions are delicious at Mesón Sacristía de la Capuchinas, where Alonso Hernandez leads cooking and cultural programs (epiculinary.com). For a day class, contact Doña Estela Salas Silva, who teaches poblano preparations in neighboring **Tlaxcala** (mexicanhomecooking.com).



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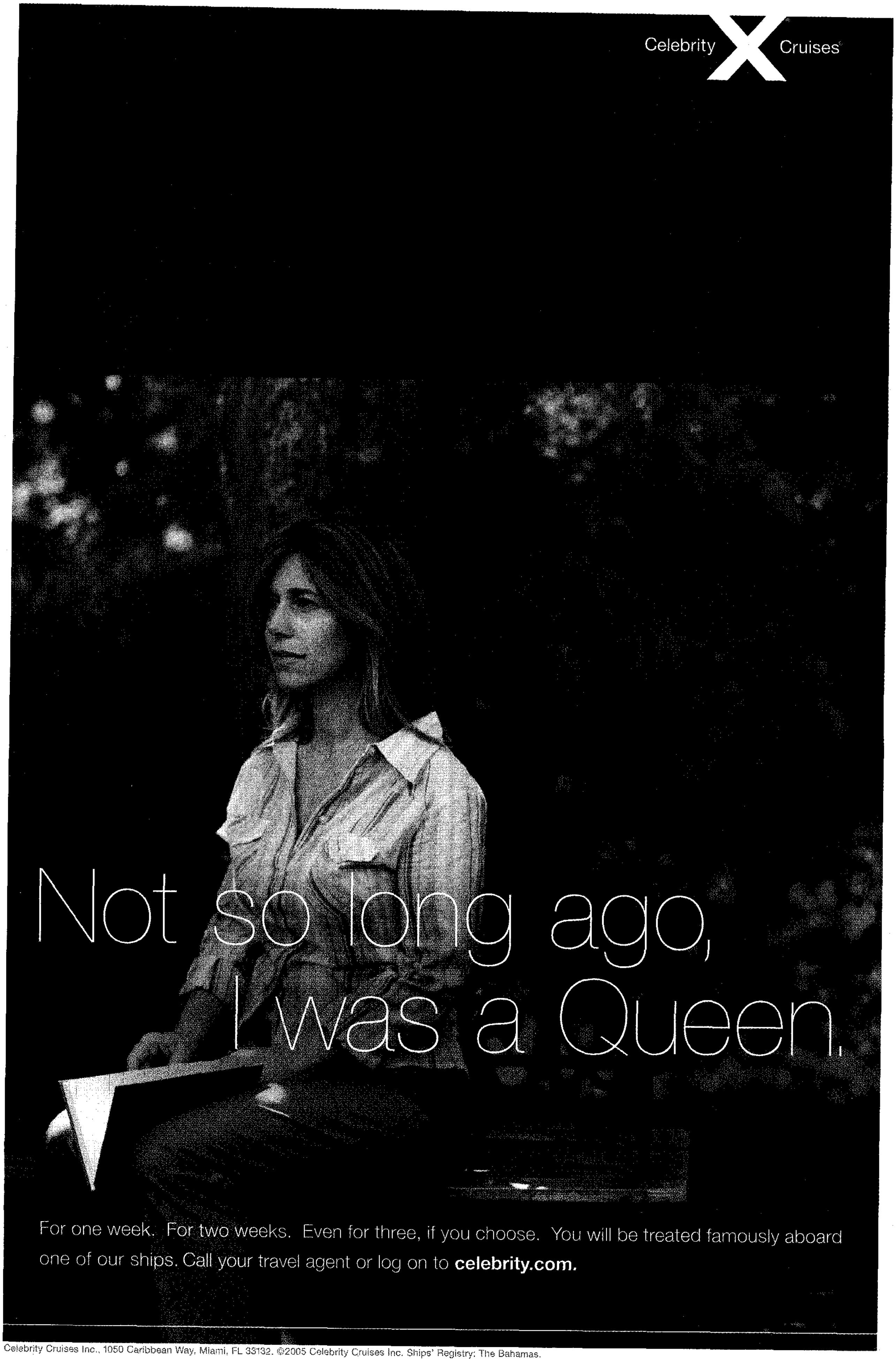
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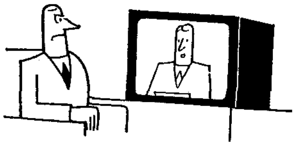
THE NEW YORKER

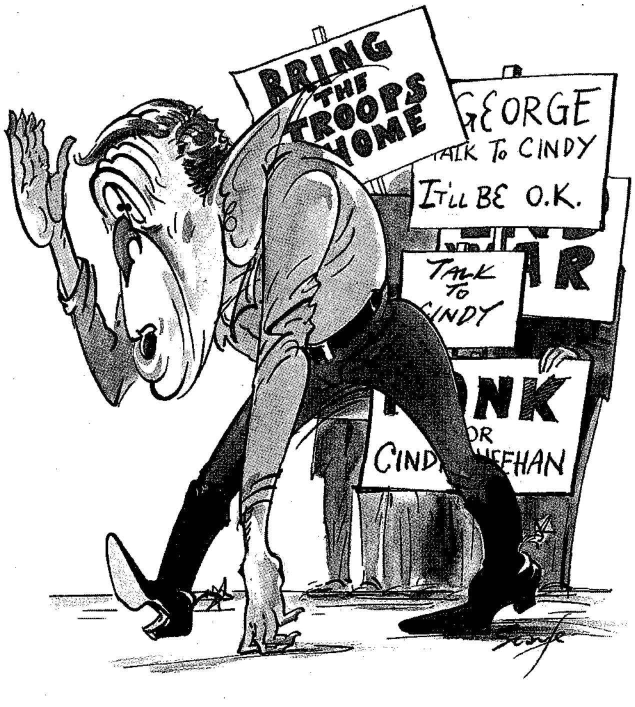
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
WAR AND ANTIWAR



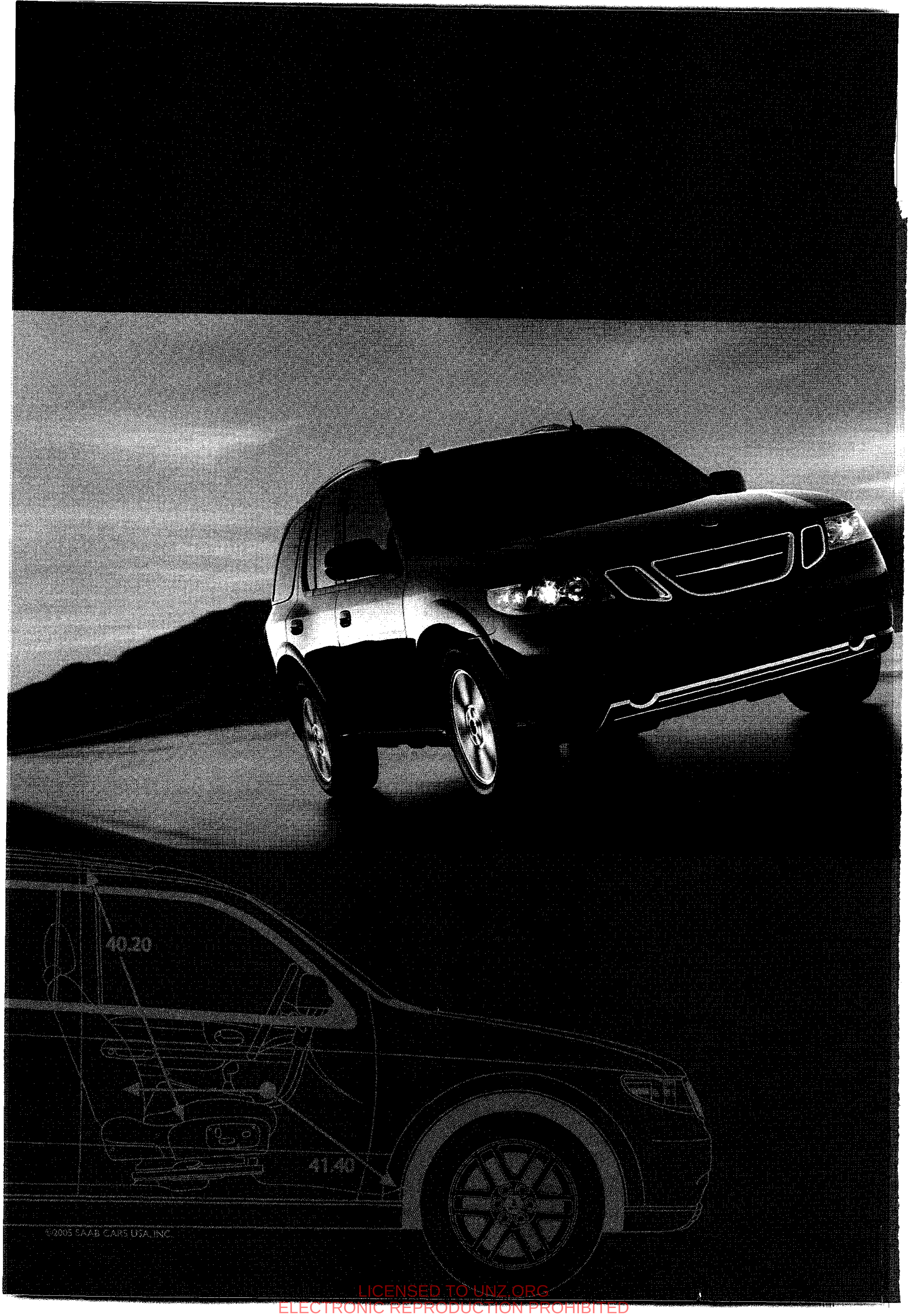
A few days after the attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush, during a visit to the still smoldering Pentagon, said that what was already called the "war on terror" would be "a different type of war"—different, presumably, from the two World Wars, different from Korea and Vietnam, different from the surrogate skirmishes in the Cold War's buffer zones, different from the Cold War itself, different from his father's war to expel Saddam Hussein's marauders from Kuwait. Four years later, many of Bush's (and others') expectations about the ensuing struggle have fallen by the wayside. But that one has proved right.

It is a different type of war. It's different because of the predominantly stateless, decentralized nature of the enemy, whose only columns are fifth columns, and because of the nature of the battlefront, which shifts week by week, minute by minute, from New York and London and Madrid to Bali and Tel Aviv and Baghdad. It's different in terms of the arsenals used to fight it, with language skills, coördinated intelligence, and body armor more useful—and in shorter supply—than the stealth bombers, nuclear submarines, and anti-ballistic missiles of the high-tech military industries. It's also different in that, unlike the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam, it is being fought not by conscript armies but by a professional standing army and, increasingly, by citizen soldiers from the state militias. Finally, it's a war whose burdens have been borne pretty much exclusively by volunteers in military service and their families, and, to a lesser extent, by the erstwhile beneficiaries of the shrinking federal safety net. The war's political managers have made absolutely no effort to create even a simulacrum of equal sacrifice, and 9/11 did nothing to change what has been from the beginning, and remains, the Bush Administration's top priority, not excluding fighting terrorism: the use of the tax code to transfer wealth to the rich and, especially, the superrich. Next week, even as the national debt grows by another $11 billion and military recruiters scramble with ever-mounting desperation to fill their quotas, the Senate will reassemble to take up the proposal, already passed by the House, to permanently eliminate the estate tax, thereby shifting some $1.5 billion a week—about the same as the Iraq war—from the public treasury to the bank accounts of the heirs to the nation's twenty thousand biggest fortunes.



Yes, it's a different type of war. But a lot depends on what the meaning of "it" is. In the nineteen-forties and, Korea notwithstanding, the nineteen-fifties, "it"—"the war"—was the Second World War. By the end of the nineteen-sixties, "the war" meant Vietnam. But what does "the war" mean now? Sometimes it means what the Administration styles the Global War on Terror, a metaphor that has occasionally discomfited some of its own officials. (This summer, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GERALD SCARFE



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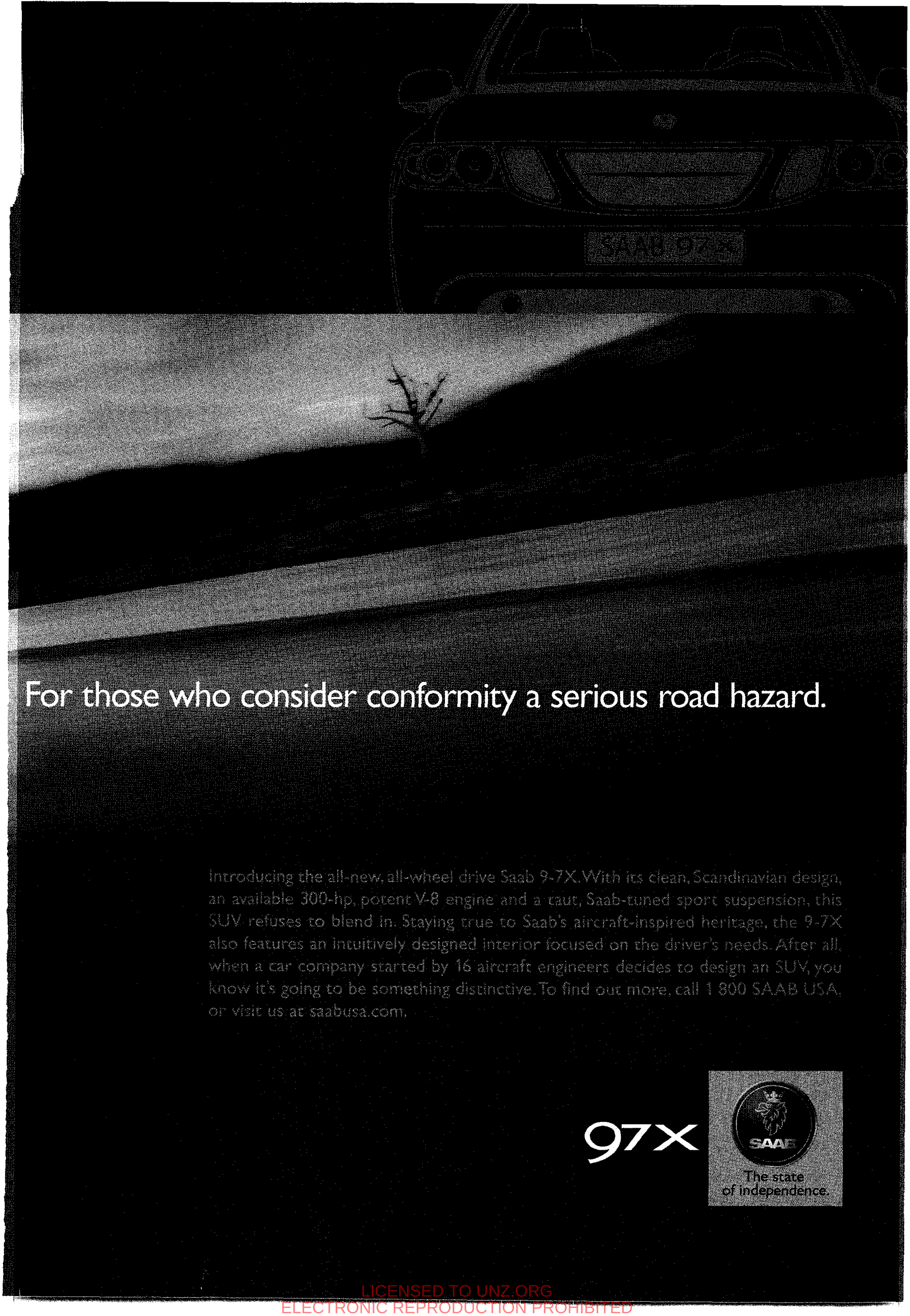
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floated "Global Struggle Against Violent Extremism"—a more accurate term, and less flattering to terrorists, which was immediately shot down by the President.) Sometimes it means the war in Iraq, which is or is not part of the larger struggle, depending on how (and when) one looks at it.

This ambiguity also makes for a different type of antiwar politics. The opposition to the Vietnam War relied on the active mobilization of masses of people—first tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, finally millions—and its demand was clear: Get out. Its Iraq counterpart, so far, is more rudimentary and, unlike its predecessor, almost completely without hostility to the military or illusions about the enemy. Not quite a movement, it is more a pyramid of complaint ranged along a line from dissent to discontent. At its peak, for the moment, is Camp Casey, the makeshift tent vigil, a mile or so from President Bush's Texas vacation estate, that has grown up around a woman named Cindy Sheehan, whose son, an Army enlisted man, was killed in Iraq seventeen months ago. In the middle is a congeries of left-populist Web groups, such as MoveOn.org. At the base is a large slice of the public, as measured by the crude instrument of public-opinion surveys—a silent majority, you might say. In a *Newsweek* poll, 61 per cent disapprove of Bush's "handling" of Iraq. In a CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll, 54 per cent say that the war there was a mistake, 57 per cent that it has made us less safe, and 56 per cent that we should withdraw all (33 per cent) or some (23 per cent) of our troops.

The numbers are eerily similar to those the Vietnam debacle generated at its worst. The sentiment they reflect, however, is not the same. The movement against that war had the support of thousands of elected officials, including, toward the end, a majority of both Houses of Congress; the opposition to this one has no such thing. But the reticence of so many Democrats is rooted as much in perplexity as in timidity.

Thirty-odd years ago, it didn't require all that much perspicacity to see that the Vietnam War could not be won—or could not be won at a remotely acceptable cost in blood and treasure, which amounts to the same thing. It didn't require much more to see that defeat in Indochina would not entail defeat in the larger struggle that had been the original rationale for America's intervention. On the contrary, the end of the Vietnam War—which, again, ended the only way it could, in a Communist victory, with the suffering and oppression it *did* entail—set the stage for the cascade of events that led to victory in the Cold War itself. In retrospect, but not only in retrospect, the demand for immediate withdrawal was both morally and strategically sound.

In Iraq, the strategic rationales for war—terrorism and "weapons of mass destruction"—have turned out to be as phony as the Gulf of Tonkin incident. With scores of thousands of Iraqis dead, an Islamist theocracy in prospect for part, if not the whole, of the country, and the possibility of civil war growing, even the humanitarian rationale has begun to wither. And the hubristic dream of Iraq (in the words of Fouad Ajami, in an essay included in a new anthology entitled "The Right War? The Conservative Debate on Iraq") as "a beacon from which to spread democracy and reason throughout the Arab world . . . has clearly been set aside." Even so: this is a different type of war. The enemy in Iraq possesses nothing like the monopoly on indigenous sources of legitimacy that was the Vietnamese Communists' decisive advantage. Saddam Hussein's regime was worse than Ho Chi Minh's. Iraq-based terrorism, once a negligible threat, is now a serious one.

Last week, even as Bush was taking a break from his vacation to denounce "immediate withdrawal of our troops in Iraq or the broader Middle East" as a step that "would only embolden the terrorists," the *Financial Times* was reporting details of the Pentagon's plans "to pull significant numbers of troops out of Iraq in the next twelve months." The chilling truth is that no one really knows what to do. No one knows whether the consequences of withdrawal, quick or slow, would be worse or better—for Iraq and for the "war on terror" of which, willy-nilly, it has become a part—than the consequences of "staying the course." It is a matter of judgment, and the judgment that will count, more chilling still, is that of George W. Bush.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

TSK-TSK DEPT.
NOR'EASTER

It won't be long now before the hurricane season has passed, and, with it, the volatility of coastal winds. Bring on the mono-directional storms—the unrelenting northerly gusts, the odd gale-force southeaster. For Edgar Comee, of Brunswick, Maine, this transition marks a heightened alert in his self-appointed role of storm-watch monitor. His ears prick, his eyes narrow, the better to flag inexcusable mentions of that most unfortunate contraction: "nor'easter." When he comes across the word, while watching a "cruddy local ABC news anchor," as he puts it, or in the pages of a national magazine (see Talk of the Town, March 14, 2005), he dispatches a ready-made blue postcard.

"Now hear this!" the card begins. "The use of *nor'easter* to describe a northeast storm is a pretentious and altogether lamentable affectation, the odious, even loathsome, practice of landlubbers who would be seen as salty as the sea itself." It continues in this baroque manner for several more sentences, and concludes, "You will of course accept my view in this matter in good part and will never again use *nor'easter*, at least in public, and thus oblige." The card is signed, "Your most humble petitioner, Edgar Comee, Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee for Stamping Out Nor'easter."

The northeast storm of which Chairman Comee speaks often originates when cold air from Canada mixes with warm air from the Gulf of Mexico, causing heavy offshore winds that veer toward the coast from a northeasterly direction. Comee, who is eighty-eight, estimates that he has sent out between one and two hundred carping postcards since the early nineteen-nineties. His is a committee of one—even his wife, he says, "couldn't care less: she comes from the mountains of North Carolina"—albeit with any number of unwitting honorary members, kindred spirits whose handiwork, in the form of letters to the editor and op-ed pieces, Comee has compiled in a clippings file. For instance, there was the seafood entrepre-

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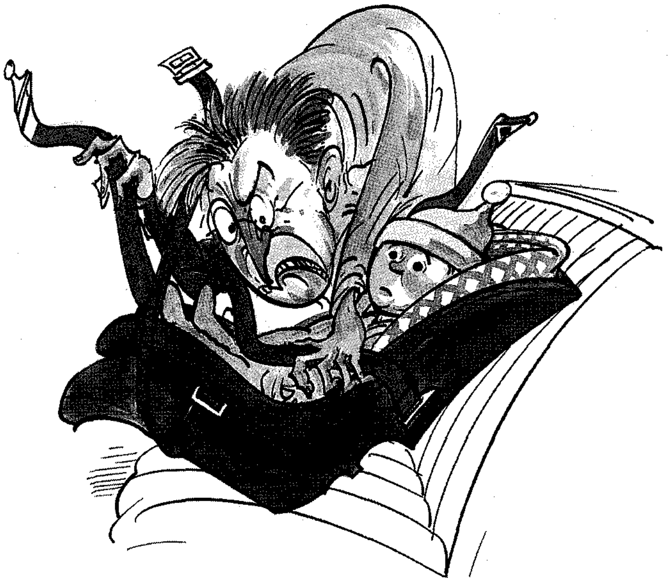
neur Ed Myers (now deceased), who, while writing for a publication called *The Working Waterfront* more than a decade ago, identified the frequent use of "nor'easter" as a "festering sore in today's marine and weather journalism." And G. W. Helfrich, whose letter of September 8, 1994, to the Portland *Press Herald* reminds us that "New Englanders exercise considerable invention in avoiding the letter 'r,'" and thereby makes the compelling case that the contraction, if there is to be one, must properly be spelled "no'theaster."

Comee is partial to the uncontracted form, but vouches for the authenticity of "no'theaster." "I picked up the fact to drop the 'r' in conversation with some of the Portland pilots who guide ships into the harbor," he said the other day, omitting an "r" or two of his own. Comee's seafaring credentials, it should be said, are impeccable. He was a Navy ship captain in the Second World War, and covered waterfront issues as a journalist for the *Press Herald* in the fifties. After some years in Washington, during which he worked as a press officer for the State Department, he retired, bought a thirty-six-foot ketch in Chesapeake Bay, and moved on board, along with his wife and two dogs. They sailed the East Coast for eight months—and managed, as he recalls, to steer clear of any treacherous storms.

So where does "nor'easter" come from? Is it, as some of Comee's like-minded pedants contend, a relatively recent and misguided invention of landlocked meteorologists who want to sound authoritative? (M. S. Hayden, another writer of letters to the *Press Herald*, once proposed that the term "was probably created by authors from Indiana who wrote about the sea.") Well, maybe not quite so recent. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the contested spelling dates as far back as 1836, when it appeared in a translation of Aristophanes.

"By the way, unfortunately, there is a school of higher education in Maine called the University of New England—a rather presumptuous title, but there they are," Comee said. "It's an institution of fairly recent history—it's come up within the last twenty-five years—and, lo and behold, its athletic teams are known as the Nor'easters. Oh, God, yes. My grandson attended the school and, knowing my interest in this subject, dragged me into their gymnasium, and there's this banner, twenty feet long or more, that says, 'Nor'easters.' So I did send off one of my cards to the president of the university." The team name remains.



As the good fight drags on, Comee has taken up other small causes. Not long ago, he sent another ready-made grievance down this way—purely for inspection. It resembled a business card, and on one side he had written, "Useful in doctor's or dentist's office." On the other: "Use of first names by younger persons in dealing with the elderly is presumptuous, demeaning, disrespectful and condescending, as though the offender were speaking to a child in need of guidance, correction or possibly a pat on the head and/or bottom." Don't call him Edgar.

—*Ben McGrath*

PUBLIC SAFETY
CAR SEAT LADY

Men, of course, do not give birth, but they have their own shadow form of labor: installing the baby's car seat. This seemingly simple job has ruined plenty of golfing Saturdays, even for guys who solved Rubik's Cube when they were younger. Thankfully, in Manhattan there's an expert for everything, and if you're expecting a son and have no idea how to get him home from the hospital, you can call Alisa Baer, the Car Seat Lady.

Baer, a twenty-five-year-old medical student with curly black hair and a nonsense-free manner, doesn't have any kids herself, but she can tell you which car seats will and will not fit in your Volvo V40. She comes from something of a safety-obsessed family. Her grandfather was a stickler for fire prevention, and her mother, who began installing car seats in Baltimore in 1984, was the original C.S.L. When Baer was a kid, she and her mother would drive around town, looking for motorists who weren't buckled up. Upon spotting one, Baer would hold a sign up to the window: "Please Fasten Your Seat Belt." If the driver complied, she would flip the sign over: "Thank You." She has only recently stopped being embarrassed about this.

When Baer first came to New York City, she found it difficult to walk down the street. Every time she glanced into a car, it seemed, she saw a potentially dangerous car seat. She started to leave her phone number on people's windshields, informing them, in polite notes, that their car seat was improperly installed and that she would be happy to help out. Over the years, she's seen some crazy jerry-rigs: bungee cords, AstroTurf, plastic piping. A number of fathers have tried to use all three seat belts as a harness. Baer knows that these men are just trying to think creatively. Still, she says, "When I hear that someone is an engineer, that scares me."

On a recent morning, Baer was advising an expecting couple outside her East Village apartment. (She used to make free house calls, but now she asks that people bring their seats to her. She's also begun charging forty-five dollars per seat, because New Yorkers told her they didn't trust something they didn't have to pay for.) "Feed the slack," she told the father. "Simulate the torsional pull."

Most people, Baer pointed out, do not install their car seat tightly enough (a good sideways tug should move the seat less than an inch). Watching her work

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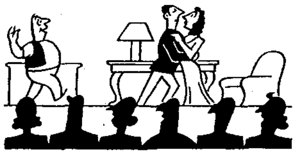
with a car seat is a bit like watching a violinist tune her instrument: she handles each device with a professional briskness, and knows its quirks and personality. First, to insure that the baby's breathing won't be restricted, she wedges some rolled-up bath towels under the rear-facing car-seat base so that it's aligned at the proper forty-five degrees. (Her tool kit also includes a carpenter's level, a locking clip, and a baby doll.) Then she does a move in which she stands on top of the base and pushes her back against the roof, to provide leverage, while the expectant dad struggles to fasten the taut belt. (The expectant mom takes notes.) Now the moment of truth: the dad tries the maneuver himself. Leaning forward, he uses a swivelling motion to force the car seat into position. It's similar to a leg press.

Baer estimates that she has installed five thousand seats in her career. She tests all the latest models herself and even purchases the most spectacular ones for further study. She hasn't been stumped yet, although the fifteen-passenger vans of some Orthodox families—filled with, say, seven to ten kids of varying ages and sizes—have posed challenges. One of her proudest achievements is placing car seats for triplets in a particularly narrow S.U.V.

Most New Yorkers, however, have a more elementary problem: they take cabs. Baer is even willing to hail taxis with pregnant women and their husbands for practice installations. The first step is usually to calm down the taxi-driver. When a cabby sees a pregnant woman, he often begins to shout, "Emergency! Hospital! Not in back seat!" Baer explains that the woman is not in labor, and that all they ask is that he not drive anywhere for ten minutes. Her advice: give the driver a dollar right away, and leave the door open.

—*Michael Agger*

THE BOARDS
ALDA ONSTAGE



Alan Alda was still going strong last week, just before the end of his four-month run in the revival of David Mamet's 1984 Pulitzer Prize-winning play "Glengarry Glen Ross."

"Maybe I'm supposed to show some wear and tear with the eight shows a week, but this is a great play, and I love acting," he said, an hour before curtain in his tiny dressing room. "This is my ecstasy."

His room was bereft of the usual show-biz memorabilia; instead, it was decorated like a study—leather armchair, small sofa with white woollen throw, a Kandinsky print, and a framed countryside photograph taken by Arlene Alda, his wife of forty-eight years. No posted photos of her or of their three daughters and seven grandchildren; no clippings of Alda as Captain Hawkeye Pierce in "M*A*S*H" or, recently, as Senator Vinick in "The West Wing" or Senator Brewster in the movie "The Aviator"; no glossies of Emmy or Golden Globe honors.

"On the stage, here and now, you have final cut," he said. "I'm free to make it different every night. It's the act of imagination that involves the whole brain and the whole body. It's a wonderful feeling. Mamet has told people that this production of the play is the best of all."

Without abandoning his exuberant tone, Alda recalled an epiphany he had a couple of years ago in Chile, where he had emergency surgery for intestinal blockage. As the host of the PBS series "Scientific American Frontiers," he had gone to a mountaintop observatory, to interview astronomers about dark energy in the universe. "I was also trying to find out what Einstein meant when he said gravity is curved space," Alda said. "Instead of finding out why I couldn't picture the fourth dimension, I found out that I now had another chance at life, and, from that moment on, it was clear to me that I would do exactly what I wanted to do. So the first thing I did was a lovely little three-character play at the small Bay Street Theatre, in Sag Harbor, not far from where we live. I didn't need a big audience. I was on the stage. And I was enjoying the pure pleasure of acting."

Alda's birth name is Alphonso D'Abruzzo. "Same as my father's name. We took the first two letters of the first and last names and put them together. My father, Robert Alda, was a movie star, very handsome, with enormous magnetism. Before that, when I was a toddler, he was in burlesque, on the road a lot, and I grew up around naked strippers and raunchy comics. On Broadway, my father was the original Sky Masterson in 'Guys and Dolls.' When I was fifteen, I used to stand in the wings, night after night, and watch him sing and dance and act. Nobody could beat him.

"Six years before he died, I had an idea for a part for him in 'M*A*S*H.' He had always wanted to be a doctor. He had wanted me to be a doctor, too, but I couldn't stand the idea of touching sick people. I made him an older, controlling type of surgeon, who couldn't get along with me. In the episode, both of us were wounded; he could use only his right hand, and I only my left hand, and that way we were able to operate together. My father was delighted. I adored him always, but all my life my mother was seriously paranoid. I was immersed in their nightly screaming, yelling fights. Carl Reiner once said, 'You're entitled to be a lot crazier than you are.'"

Enter a young assistant carrying a large brown envelope. "It's from your publisher," he said. "Maybe it's your book."

"My book!" Alda opened the package. He held up a copy—"Never Have Your Dog Stuffed"—and quickly looked inside. "With Arlene's photographs. And the one I took of her. We had just had our first child."

Enter Liev Schreiber, Alda's co-star. He looked sleepy and exhausted. Alda handed him the book.

"You're in this, Liev," Alda said. "Now you gotta read it."

Schreiber took the book and opened it. He yawned. "Sorry, I've been working fourteen-hour days editing my film."

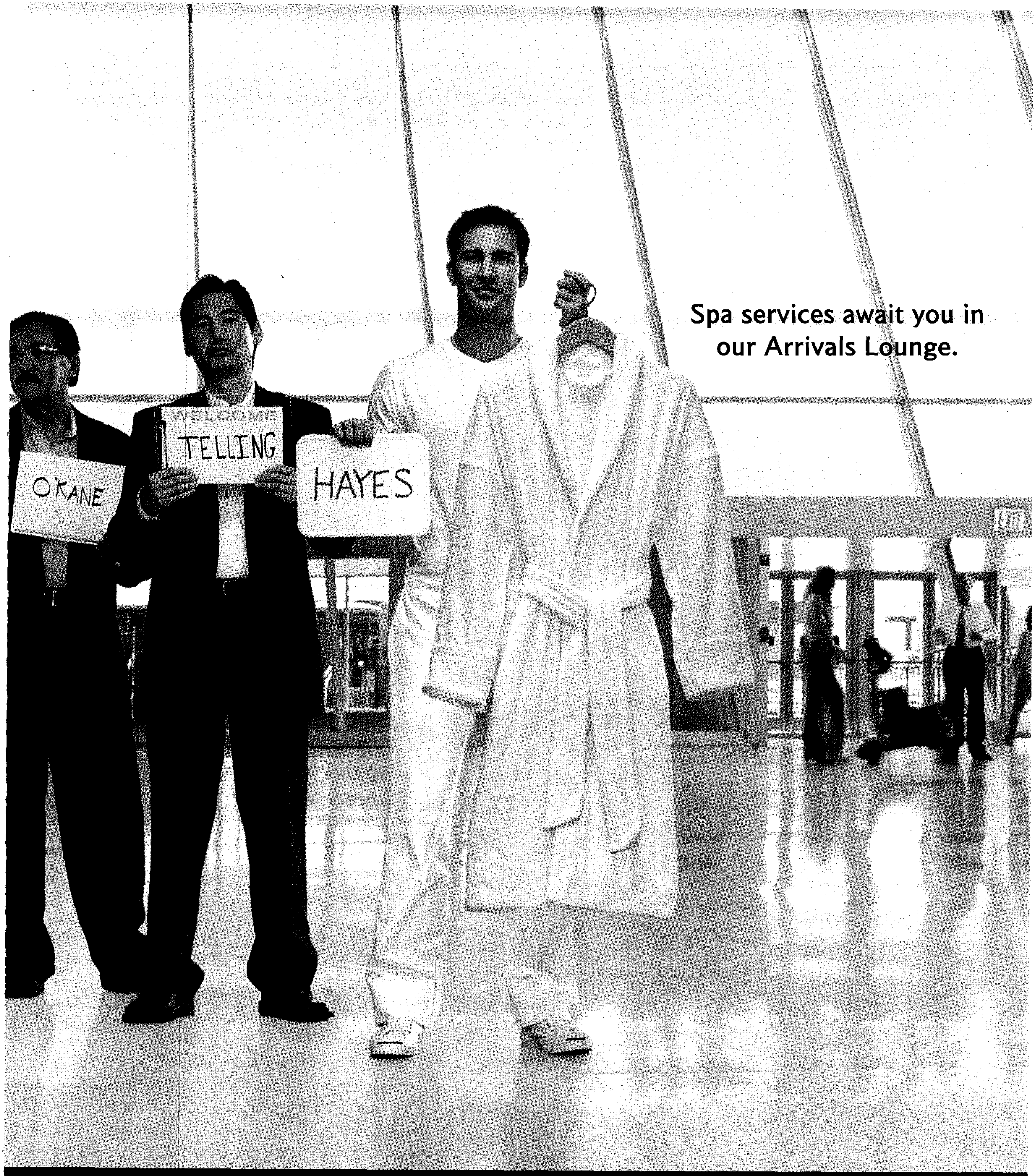
"Look, I put a picture of you in it," Alda said. "Of you with me in the play."

Schreiber looked at the picture, then turned to the end of the book. "I like to read the last line," he said.

"You can't just read the first and the last line in this book," Alda said, with a long laugh. Schreiber smiled. "This is the way we get our energy up," Alda said.

A few minutes later, the curtain rose and both actors started going through their paces. Ecstasy.

—*Lillian Ross*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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

CHECK, PLEASE

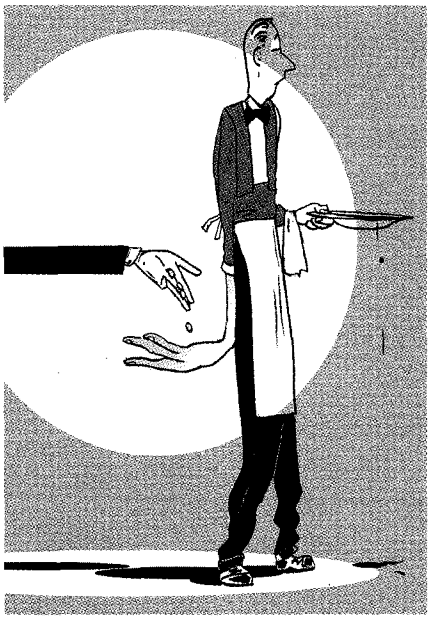
Thomas Keller is one of the world's most respected chefs, a best-selling cookbook author, and the owner of four successful high-end restaurants. Until a few weeks ago, he seemed a model of entrepreneurial rigor. Then news broke that Keller had decided to abolish tipping at his New York restaurant Per Se, starting this month, and replace it with the kind of fixed service charge that's common in Europe. Now some people are calling him un-American for scrapping a system in which waiters are rewarded on the basis of their individual performance.

Restaurant workers in the United States make more than twenty-five billion dollars a year in tips, so it's natural that people think of the custom as quintessentially American. But it wasn't always. Tipping didn't take hold here until after the Civil War, and even as it spread it met with fervent public opposition from people who considered it a toxic vestige of Old World patronage. Anti-tipping associations were formed; newspapers—including the *Times*—regularly denounced the custom. Tipping, the activists held, fostered a master-servant relationship that was ill suited to a nation in which people were meant to be social equals. William R. Scott, in his 1916 polemic "The Itching Palm," described the tip as the price that "one American is willing to pay to induce another American to acknowledge inferiority"; *Gunton's Magazine* labelled the custom "offensively un-American," arguing that workers here should seek honest wages "instead of fawning for favors." The anti-tipping campaigns were so effective that six states actually banned the practice.

The opponents of tipping got some important things right. They saw that tipping was an aberration in a free-market economy, and that tips had a lot in common with gifts. They also understood that economics alone could not explain why customers were willing to tip. What they missed was that the very things they thought made tipping un-American—the waiters' need to cultivate a relationship with the customer, and their reliance on that customer's largesse—were exactly what would eventually make tipping a powerful social norm.

People tip even though they don't have to. Since they tip after they've been served, they're not buying good treatment in advance. Nor are they just buttering up their regular waitresses—studies show that people tip about as well at out-of-town restaurants as they do at their local Bennigan's. Americans are paying money that they do not have to pay, then, while receiving no obvious benefit as a result.

So why tip? When people are asked, they usually say that they tip to reward good service. Yet how much people tip is determined mainly by how much their meal cost, and the cost of a meal at a given restaurant is usually only tenuously connected to the work required to serve it. (It's just as easy to open a hundred-dollar bottle of wine as it is to open a thirty-dollar bottle.) In an extensive survey of tipping studies, Michael Lynn, a professor at Cornell, found only a weak correlation between the quality of service that people report receiving and the tips they give. On average, exceptional service raised tips by about 1.5 per cent, which, Lynn argues, is too small for waiters to notice. And countries where there's no tipping—like Australia and Japan—don't have worse service than the United States.



It's instructive to consider the sort of things that tippers actually respond to. In one study, a waitress received fifty per cent more in tips when she introduced herself by name than when she didn't. In another, waiters sharply increased their tips by giving each member of a dining party a piece of candy and then, seemingly spontaneously, offering each person a second piece, too. Squatting by the table instead of standing, writing "Thank you" on the back of checks, and touching customers on their shoulders all measurably improved tips. And waitresses at an upscale restaurant who simply put flowers in their hair boosted their tips by seventeen per cent.

These tricks may seem cutesy, but they help personalize the relationship between the customer and the server, which tells you something important about the nature of tipping. The practice really belongs to what sociologists call a gift economy rather than to a market one. The free market, at least in theory, is all about impersonal exchange—as long as you have goods to sell and I have money to buy them, we can make a deal, regardless of how we feel about each other. But, when it comes to tipping, who we are and how we feel matter a lot, because a tip is essentially a gift, and we give better gifts to people we like than to people we don't. Tippers aren't trying to drive hard bargains or maximize their economic interests; they're trying to demonstrate their status and to reciprocate what they see as good behavior.

This is, on both sides, a more uncertain process than a simple service charge would be. But that uncertainty—that freedom to exercise discretion, to leave as little or as much as you wish—is why tipping has flourished as a social institution. (In the same spirit, Americans prefer giving charity privately rather than through their government.) Diners—eighty per cent of whom say that they prefer tipping to a set service charge—like the power that the ability to tip gives them. Waiters like tipping because it gives them the chance to distinguish themselves from the crowd and to score an occasional windfall. Tipping, curiously, has gone from being the antithesis of individualism to its apotheosis. That's not because tipping has changed. It's because America has.

—*James Surowiecki*

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LETTER FROM ECUADOR

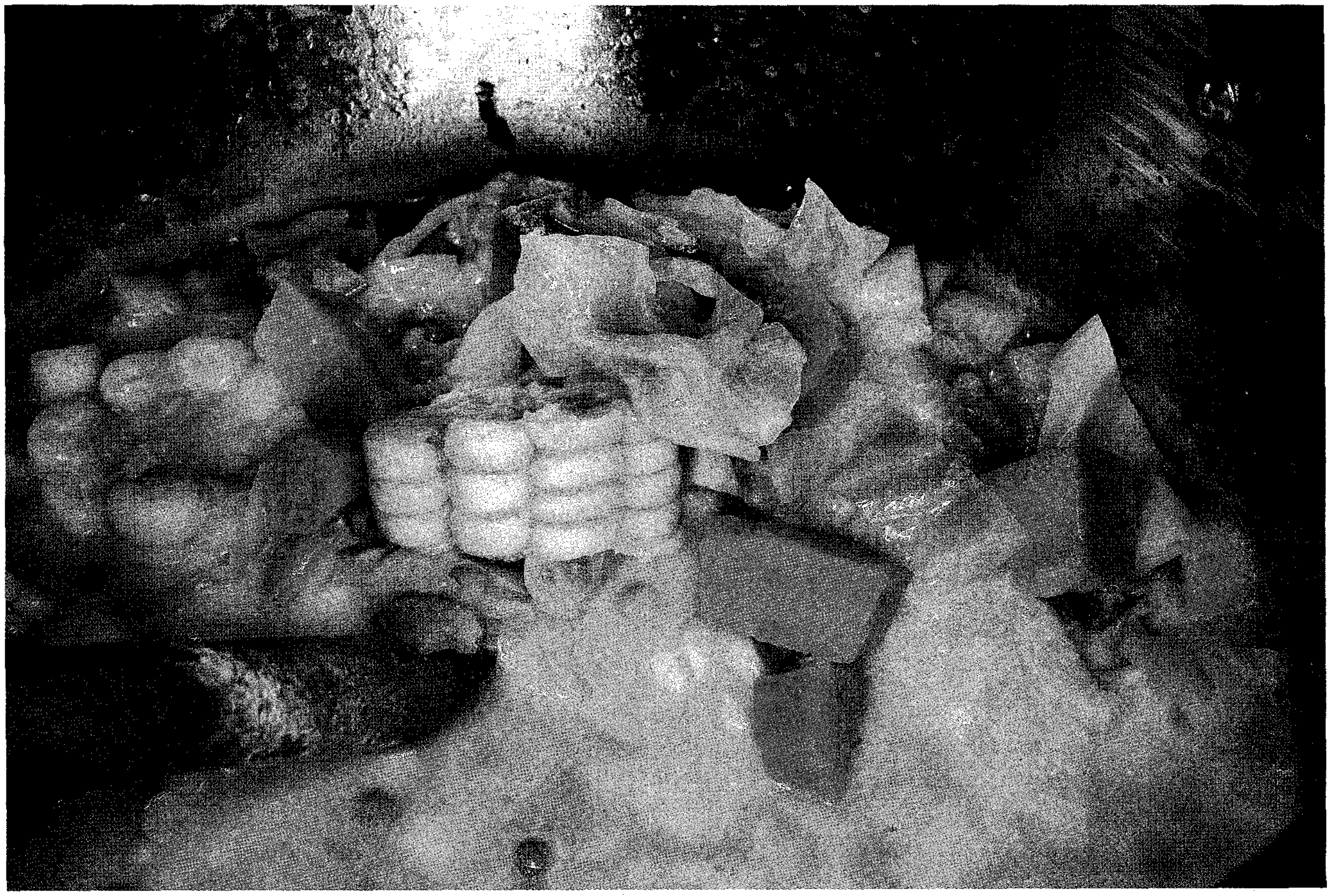
SPEAKING OF SOUP

The culinary approach to Spanish.

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

I try not to let a decade pass without renewing my assault on Spanish, which I keep hearing described as an easy language to learn. In the nineties, in preparation for a trip to northern Spain, I bought myself a videotape Spanish course in the form of a sixteen-episode soap opera—what Latin Americans call a *telenovela*—about a young lawyer who finds love while investigating what happened to her client's first wife. I got so that I could understand the actors fairly well, but when I arrived in Santiago de Compostela I was less successful at understanding people who did not keep repeating, slowly and very clearly, sentences like "Rosario did not die in the war; she escaped that tragedy, thank God." When I decided last winter to regroup my forces, it occurred to me that Ecuador might be a good place to study Spanish this go-around. I had in mind Cuenca, around Holy Week. From what I'd gathered during a previous trip to Ecuador, Holy Week is the only time of year you can get *fanesca*—an exceedingly thick and hearty soup, heavy on the beans. I adore *fanesca*, and, given my record in trying to solve the mysteries of a foreign tongue, I figured that having a particularly appealing fallback made a lot of sense.

Cuenca is a graceful colonial city in the part of the Andes that Ecuadorans call the Southern Highlands. Although it's Ecuador's third-largest city, it wasn't connected by paved road to the rest of the country until the sixties. Among Ecuador's urban-dwellers, Cuencans are thought of as the most traditionalist in matters of religion and culture. I'm a traditionalist myself, at least when it comes to the food associated with various holidays. When Hanukkah arrives, I expect potato latkes. I favor candy corn on Halloween. I am perfectly willing to forgo Christmas fruitcake, but that is about the extent of my flexibility. (The campaign I carried on some years ago to change the national Thanksgiving dish from turkey to spaghetti carbonara was a matter not of straying from a holiday tradition but of attempting to build a stronger holiday tradition around a more historically appropriate and, if I may say so, considerably tastier dish.) For years, I went to Brooklyn every New Year's Day to join some friends from North Carolina in eating Hoppin' John, the dish that many Southerners serve for good luck every January 1st. Eventually, my North Carolina friends moved away, and I haven't felt entirely comfortable with a fresh January since. I knew there was every reason to believe that during Holy Week I could have expected to



HANS GISSINGER

Holy Week is the only time of year you can get fanesca—an exceedingly thick and hearty soup, heavy on the beans.

find *fanesca* not just in Cuenca but also in Quito, or even in comparatively secular and cosmopolitan Guayaquil, the port city that serves as the commercial center of Ecuador. Still, it never hurts to be certain.

If I'd had any doubts about my choice of cities, they were erased as soon as I arrived, ten days or so before Easter. Right down the street from my hotel, I found a language school that offered one-on-one instruction, and I took a written placement test on the spot—a test I thought I'd managed pretty well until I got to a final section on the subjunctive. (I've spent some time since then contemplating the possibility that I might be too old for the subjunctive.) Both of my teachers turned out to be natives of the city who were as knowledgeable about local customs as they were about Spanish grammar. Also, they spoke Spanish as clearly as the lawyer in my *telenovela*.

They both assured me that the custom of families eating *fanesca* on Good Friday remained strong in Cuenca, and that many restaurants would be serving it during the entire week before that. My first trip to one of Cuenca's markets made it obvious that I was about as close to the source of *fanesca's* ingredients as I could get without living in the middle of a bean patch. All the vegetables and spices required—corn, for instance, and fava beans and a couple of kinds of squash—grow in the area, and some of them apparently don't make it as far as Guayaquil, which is only thirty minutes away by air. That may be because the distribution system seems to consist largely of indigenous women who come to the market from the countryside, many of them in the bright-colored flared skirts and high-crowned panama hats that can make even a small woman of some years look rather, well, zippy. In the markets, they sit behind gunnysacks of what their families have grown—ten or twelve kinds of potatoes, or outsized corn kernels of various ages, or a selection of beans so large and potatoes so small that even one of those compulsive veggie connoisseurs who frequent markets like Union Square, in Manhattan, or the Ferry Building, in San Francisco, would have to do some close inspection to make certain that she wasn't on the path to making her signature bean salad out of spuds by mistake.

Cuencans may not be as strict about some Easter customs as they once were—partly, it's thought, because so many of them have in recent years spent time working in somewhat looser societies, like the United States. But many families, I was told by my teachers, still observe the custom of visiting seven churches on the evening before Good Friday, a task that requires devotion but not much walking in the churchy center of the city. Both of my teachers said that as children they were not permitted on Good Friday to wear bright clothes or to play a musical instrument or to listen to music other than sacred music. They were also not permitted to bathe, since an old belief in the area holds that anyone who bathes on Good Friday might be transformed into a fish. I noticed that "Vive Cuenca," a bilingual booklet of local events that is published each month, finished up its description of this belief by saying, "Take care! Would not be you the first to be converted in one small fish, for not putting care to this myth"—a small witticism that served to give me some idea of how my Spanish must have sounded to my instructors all these years.

Exactly a week before Good Friday, I scored my first *fanesca*, right on schedule, at a small but pleasant restaurant in downtown Cuenca called Ceres. The *fanesca* did not disappoint; it matched the memory I'd preserved of the *fanesca* I had come across half a dozen years before, in the course of a ceviche ramble that, purely by luck, happened to overlap with Holy Week. *Fanesca* has a base of salt cod cooked in milk and thickened with pumpkin seeds. Traditionally, it contains twelve different beans or grains—one for each of the twelve apostles, some people say. Floating on top—or, more likely, lying on top, since this is a marginally liquid bowl of soup—you normally find part of a hard-boiled egg and a miniature empanada or two and often some plantain. My teachers told me that as Good Friday approaches the children of the family often act as assistant peelers and soakers and washers and choppers. Still, when you gaze into a bowl of *fanesca* it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the

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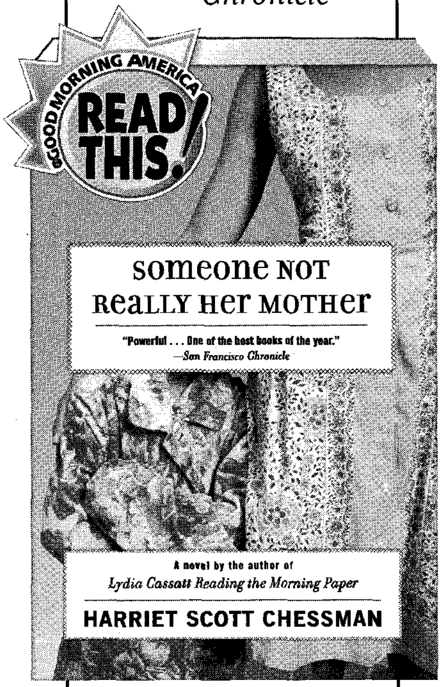
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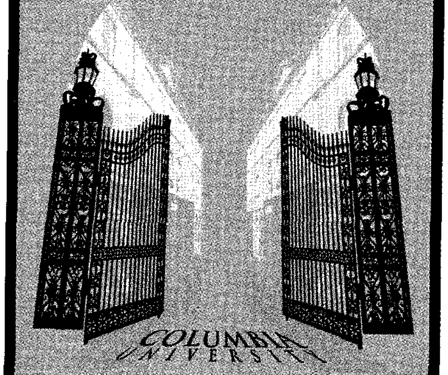

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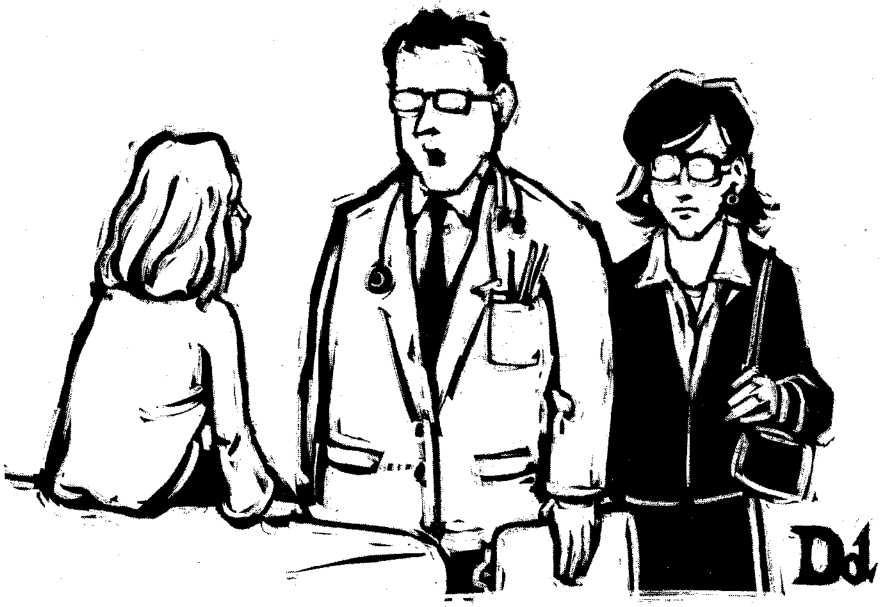


"Alternatively, your mother could have a cooking disorder."

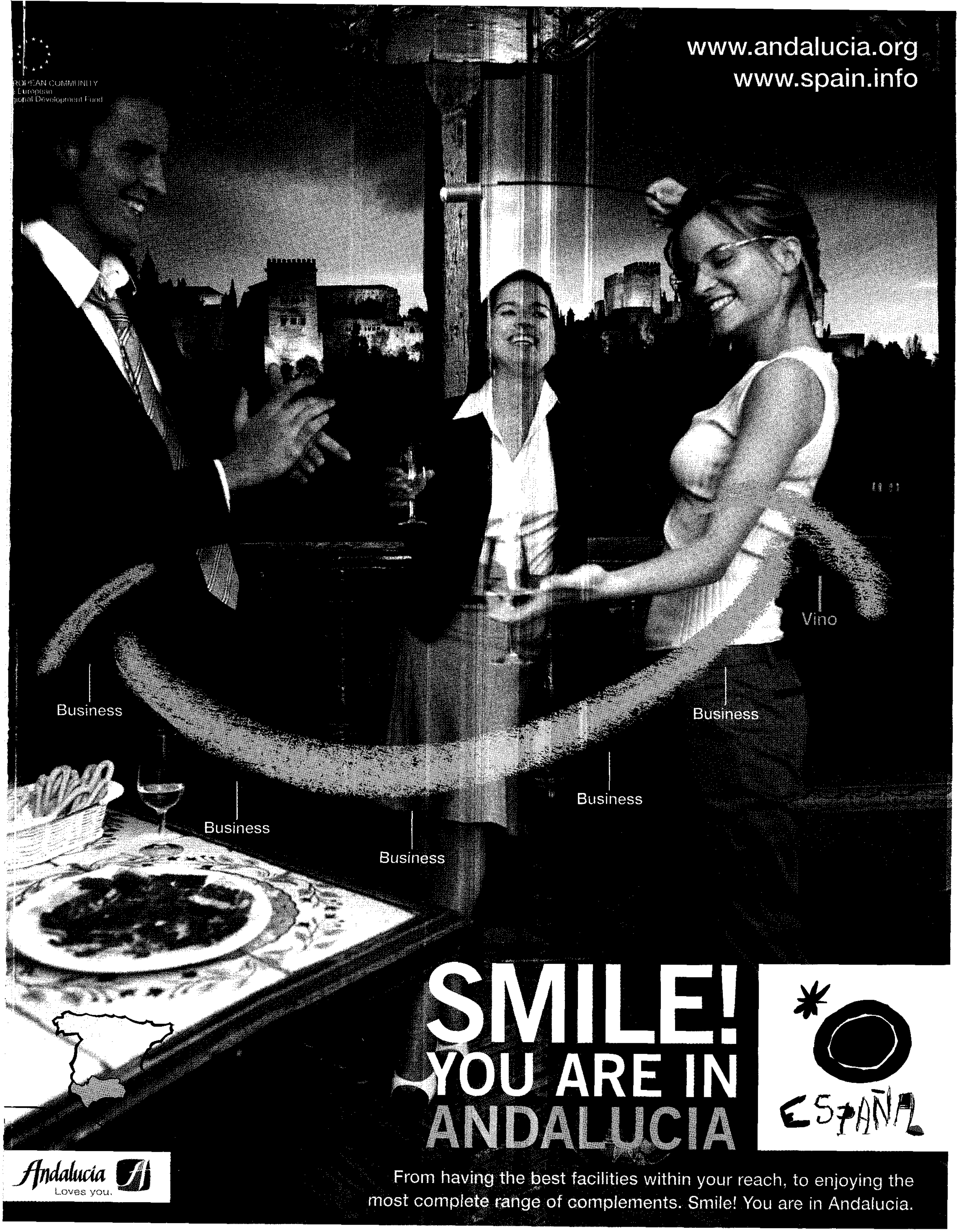
• •

mother or grandmother in charge of the kitchen serves it only once a year because once a year is often enough for her to spend all that time preparing a dozen vegetables—just as Jewish mothers of traditional habits may think that once a year is often enough to risk losing bits of knuckle to that potato shredder in the process of making the Hanukkah latkes the old-fashioned way.

When my teachers heard during afternoon classes that after having a *fanesca* for my midday meal I intended to have another one for dinner that evening—at El Maíz, a restaurant that describes its food as Cuencan rather than Ecuadoran—they looked at me the way an American might look at someone who had just announced that he intended to have two Thanksgiving dinners. In a Cuencan home on Good Friday, they explained, a bowl of *fanesca* is a meal in itself, except for something like fruit for dessert, and supper that evening tends to be light. It's true that when I was about halfway through the *fanesca* at Ceres—I'd calculated that I could finish the bowl if I paused for a moment to get my second wind—it occurred to me that this couldn't have been what my mother had in mind when she told me to finish my vegetables. On the other hand, my window of opportunity was not wide. I thought about saying to my teachers, "So many *fanescas,* so little time," but by the time I had constructed that in Spanish the moment had passed.

Being able to say anything I wanted to in Spanish before the moment had passed was what I'd been daydreaming about. I was thinking of the day when my response to a particularly good *fanesca* (the only kind of *fanesca* I've ever experienced) would no longer be limited to "delicious" or "very tasty, thank you." I could envision myself pushing back from the table and making a statement to the waiter that was as complex as the dish itself—something like "I can't take leave of this glorious establishment without saying, in utmost sincerity, that the *fanesca* I've just had the honor of consuming made my heart soar, or at least go pitter-patter, and I want to emphasize that each and every bean had a valiant role to play in what was, when all is said and done, a perfectly blended and modulated work of art." In that daydream, the waiter is so impressed by my eloquence that he offers me seconds. I decline, with a short speech that reminds him of something he once read in a story by Jorge Luis Borges.

My teachers didn't seem to find it odd that most of my questions in the first couple of days of classes were about restaurants and local delicacies. In fact, they appeared to be relieved. One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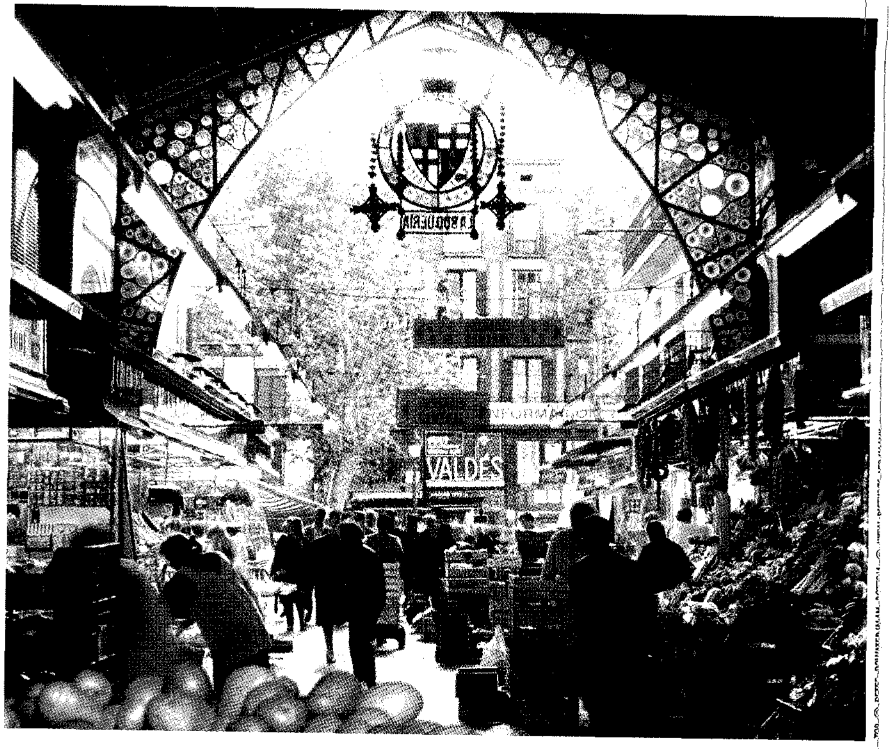
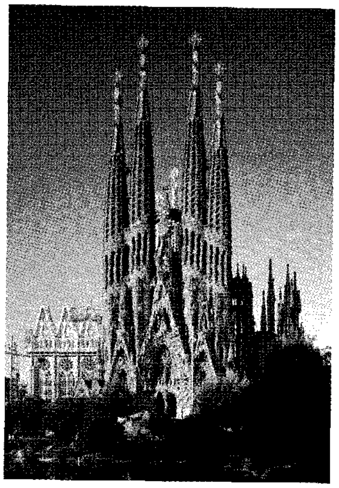


¡Abundancia!

Ancient villages and cities with cathedrals and meandering byways set among mountains, plains, and deserts make up exotic Spain. Successively ruled by emperors, sultans, and kings, Spain is a tapestry of contrasts. Fascinating relics of a complex history abound in its architecture and culture, but likely nothing better reflects its soul more than its cuisine.

With influence from the Romans, the Moors, the Jews, and, with a nod to the Americas and the Far East, Spain looks primarily to the sea for many of its specialties. Barcelona's streets are lined with a variety of restaurants, many offering traditional dishes such as *zarzuela de mariscos,* a seafood stew named after a Spanish style of operetta and made with squid, shrimp, mussels, clams, and Spanish brandy. (Nine establishments in Barcelona have earned Michelin stars.)

Through March 2006, Barcelona will celebrate the Year of Food, Cuisine, and Gastronomy that will include cooking competitions, workshops, food fairs, and tastings of wine and sparkling cava wine. Walking tours will visit La Boqueria, a landmark food market. Cooking demonstrations by celebrated chefs will showcase Catalán ingredients such as *xató* pepper sauce and *el calçot* spring onions. Throughout this city, with the largest district of Gothic architecture anywhere in Europe, a "tapas trail" can be followed, convenient for those wishing to explore Antonio Gaudí landmarks, such as La Sagrada Família.



Bilbao—known for its Guggenheim Museum and the Santiago Calatrava-designed Zubizuri Bridge and international airport—is also Northern Spain's culinary hub. The city celebrates Basque Gastronomy Year through December with cooking demonstrations, wine tastings, and screenings of food-themed films. Art, design, cookbook, and photography exhibitions are also slated to round out the event.

Maps point the way to a surfeit of *pinxtos* (Basque for tapas) bars, restaurants, and chocolatiers. Classes with chefs dedicated to delicacies such as the piquant *vizcaina* sauce (dried peppers and onions) will be held, while others will set their focus on Basque ingredients like fresh cod, effervescent white Txakoli wine, and naturally smoked Idiazábal cheese.

Bilbao's Casco Viejo (medieval quarter) is home to many popular pinxtos bars, as well as the fourteenth-century Cathedral de Santiago. Nearby, visitors can rub elbows with local chefs at the Mercado de la Ribera, a four-hundred-stall Art Deco market.

This year, Spain will laud what the world already knows: its cuisine is the ideal complement to the cornucopia of the architecture, history, and culture of this richly complex and beautiful country. ▬

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of the difficulties of taking one-on-one conversational Spanish lessons, I remembered from earlier attempts, is that either the teacher or the student has to come up with something for the conversation to be about. Right from the start, in that awkward period when both teacher and student might be wondering where this conversation could possibly go after they got through the question of where the student was from and what the weather was like there, we could discuss *fanesca*. We could also discuss *maíz tostados*, which are fried kernels of Andean corn. If you're in luck—which you usually are if you buy your *maíz tostados* from one of the women sitting behind a gunnysack in the market—they are kernels of Andean corn that have been prepared in the same pan as *fritada*, a local specialty that could be summarized as pork that has been fried just short of forever. *Maíz tostados* are the best thing I've ever come across to nibble on with drinks—so good, in fact, that you don't really need the drinks. We also had long conversations about *humitas*, which have some resemblance to tamales. Instead of being dough around some central element like pork or chicken, though, *humitas* are the same all the way through—an astonishingly light concoction of fresh young corn that is ground and mixed with eggs and cheese and butter and anise and a bit of sugar. If tamales tasted more like soufflés, they'd taste like *humitas*. In Cuenca, walking through the market or even down a street, one passes *humita* venders all the time—or maybe I should say one comes to *humita* venders all the time, since I never actually succeeded in passing one without stopping.

And my questions in Spanish about *fanesca* did not stop with requests for restaurant tips. One day, I posed the same hypothetical question to both of my teachers: Let's say that an Ecuadoran soldier has fought valiantly for his country in a war—assume, for instance, that Ecuador invaded France, looking for weapons of mass destruction—and has been gravely wounded. He's sent home, but it is clear that he has only a few weeks to live. His mother asks what she can do for him, and he says that all he wants before he dies is a bowl of her *fanesca*. But it's August. The mother is an observant woman, someone who wears black on Good Friday and visits seven churches the evening before and has never even thought about making *fanesca* any time except during Holy Week. Does she make an exception for her dying son? One of my teachers said definitely yes. The other one reminded me that some of the ingredients in *fanesca* wouldn't be available in August, except perhaps in dried form. If the mother attempted to grant the brave soldier's wish, he might end up with the sort of *fanesca* people eat in Guayaquil.

When we ran out of food talk, I made do for a while by discussing differences in idioms—a subject that has been a staple of my Spanish instruction over the decades. I always get caught up in the fact that, for example, the Spanish equivalent of "You're pulling my leg" is "You're taking my hair"—one of my teachers told me of some demonstrators who, as a symbol of not wanting to be lied to by the government anymore, appeared in front of a government building with shaved heads—or that Ecuadorans who want to leave well enough alone say that they don't want to look for the fifth paw of the cat. I find it fascinating that a carefully raised woman in Ecuador who stubs her toe or gets a paper cut says "*Miercoles!*" ("Wednesday") to avoid saying "*mierda*," in the same way a similarly raised American in the same situation would say "Sugar!" Yes, I know that I would be much better off studying verb forms instead of collecting idioms, but I can't help it. I use the idioms, even without having mastered the verb forms. On a previous trip to Ecuador, for instance, I'd learned the word *aniñados*, which literally means "childish ones" but in Ecuador refers to spoiled rich people. I now find it hard to believe that I got by in Manhattan for years without having that word in my vocabulary.

As the days went on, either my Spanish improved or I got more desperate for subjects to talk about, because I found myself enlightening my teachers on such American topics as the political impact of soccer moms and the metaphorical use of "white bread," as in "He comes from a very white-bread family." I was concerned that the teachers might use any sustained lull as an excuse to launch an exploration of the subjunctive. Desperation is probably inadequate as

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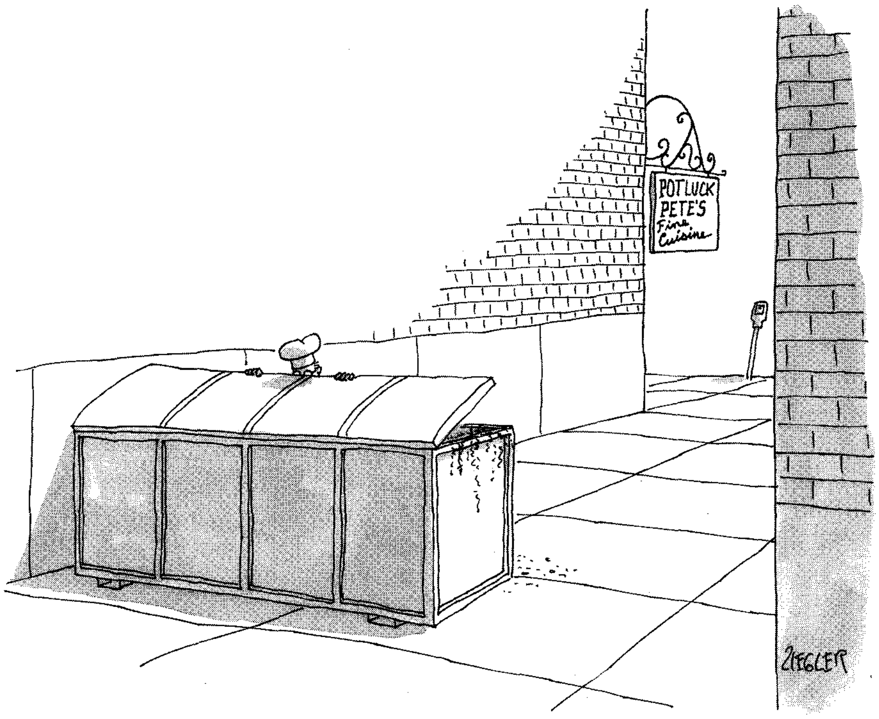
an explanation of how one day I came to be telling one of my teachers the plot of "High Noon." Looking back on this incident, I can say that it followed logically from a discussion of comparative court systems that included the word for "jury," which in Spanish is *jurado.* That led, not unexpectedly, to my mentioning the noted Mexican actress Katy Jurado, who, of course, appeared in "High Noon," playing the role of what I think could be fairly described as "*la puta con un corazón de oro.*" That led to telling the plot of "High Noon." Did I do the theme music? You can't tell the plot of "High Noon" without doing the theme music.

On the Monday afternoon before Easter, I found myself with something to make conversation about. "I have to say that the Holy Week traditions of Cuenca are disappearing," I told one of my teachers, disapprovingly, in careful Spanish. The specific tradition I had in mind was serving *fanesca* in restaurants for the week before Good Friday. I had assumed that I might have myself a four-*fanesca* weekend, but the only new *fanesca* outlet I'd found was at the unlikely venue of Trattoria Novecento, an Italian restaurant whose menu items ran toward *mozzarella in carrozza* and chicken Milanese. I'd half expected the waiter to come around and adorn my soup with grated Parmesan and extra-virgin olive oil, but the *fanesca* I got was palpably authentic—proof, I surmised, that the Trattoria Novecento, like so many New York restaurants of whatever ethnicity, had at least one Ecuadoran in the kitchen.

My failure to find more restaurants that were serving *fanesca* didn't mean that I'd gone hungry. For a couple of meals, my alternative turned out to be at one of the market food stands that specialize in roast pig—displayed whole, with his detached head turned back at an impossible angle, as if he'd been lying on his stomach to take the sun and had looked around suddenly to see who was sneaking up behind him. The booths all serve *hornado,* pork pulled off the pig and a couple of crisp pieces of golden-brown skin, accompanied by *mote* (boiled kernels of corn, sometimes compared to hominy) and *llapingachos,* which anybody who was raised in the Midwest is tempted to call potato puffs. *Hornado*—or even a *sándwich de pernil,* which is the same meat, except on a bun—could make some people forget about *fanesca,* but I had kept my focus. I'd counted on getting *fanesca* for Monday lunch at Villa Rosa, widely considered the best restaurant in Cuenca, I told my teacher, but the waiter informed me that they wouldn't be serving it until Wednesday. My account continued with what I'd said to the waiter upon learning how long I'd have to wait for my Villa Rosa *fanesca:* "*Miercoles!*" My teacher burst out laughing. I'd seen it coming—a play on words in Spanish. I would rather have had the *fanesca,* but a play on words in Spanish was definitely progress.

By the following Thursday, I found it hard to believe that I'd ever lamented the absence of *fanesca* in the restaurants of Cuenca. For a couple of days, I'd been having two *fanescas* a day—all delicious, and all heavy enough to make me wonder whether or not I was going to be able to come out of my corner for the next round. I told one of my teachers that I wanted to apologize to the citizens of Cuenca for implying that they were backsliders. O.K., I didn't know how to say "backsliders," but there were words to that effect. That evening, rather than seek out a new *fanesca* purveyor to try, I joined the throngs making the traditional visit to seven churches. The streets of Cuenca were jammed, and food venders were taking advantage of the foot traffic by setting up stands in front of the various churches, selling *humitas* and cotton candy and a sort of shish kebab that Cuencans like and popcorn and homemade chips of potatoes or plantains. Although I started out the evening thinking I might still be full from lunch, I visited at least seven churches, worried that I might otherwise miss the best *humita*-maker. We all have our own way of observing traditions.

I was to spend Good Friday itself in Guayaquil, before flying back to New York, so I phoned Humberto Mata, an American-educated Guayaquileño with whom I'd once consumed a certain amount of ceviche, to see if he could have lunch. Aware of my mission, he said he would endeavor to find another example of *fanesca*—even after I'd felt obliged to tell him that Cuencans had some unkind things to say about the coastal version. I thanked him, and then I said, in English, a sentence I thought I'd never utter: "Humberto, I think I'm all *fanescad* out." That was then. There's nothing I would like now more than a bowl of *fanesca.* By Holy Week, I expect to be desperate. ♦



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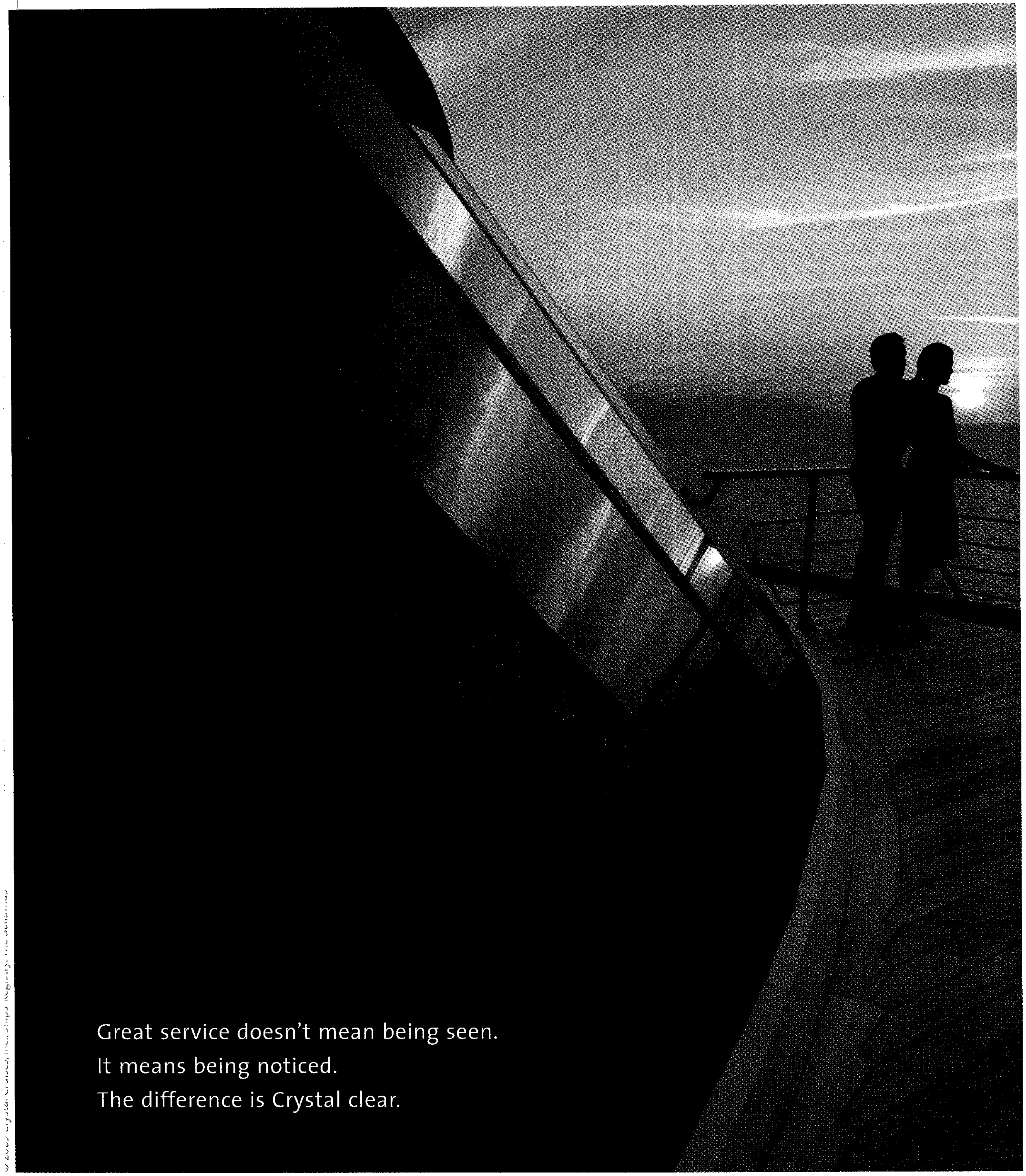
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NIGHT KITCHENS

Where making bean curd is an ancient art.

BY JUDITH THURMAN

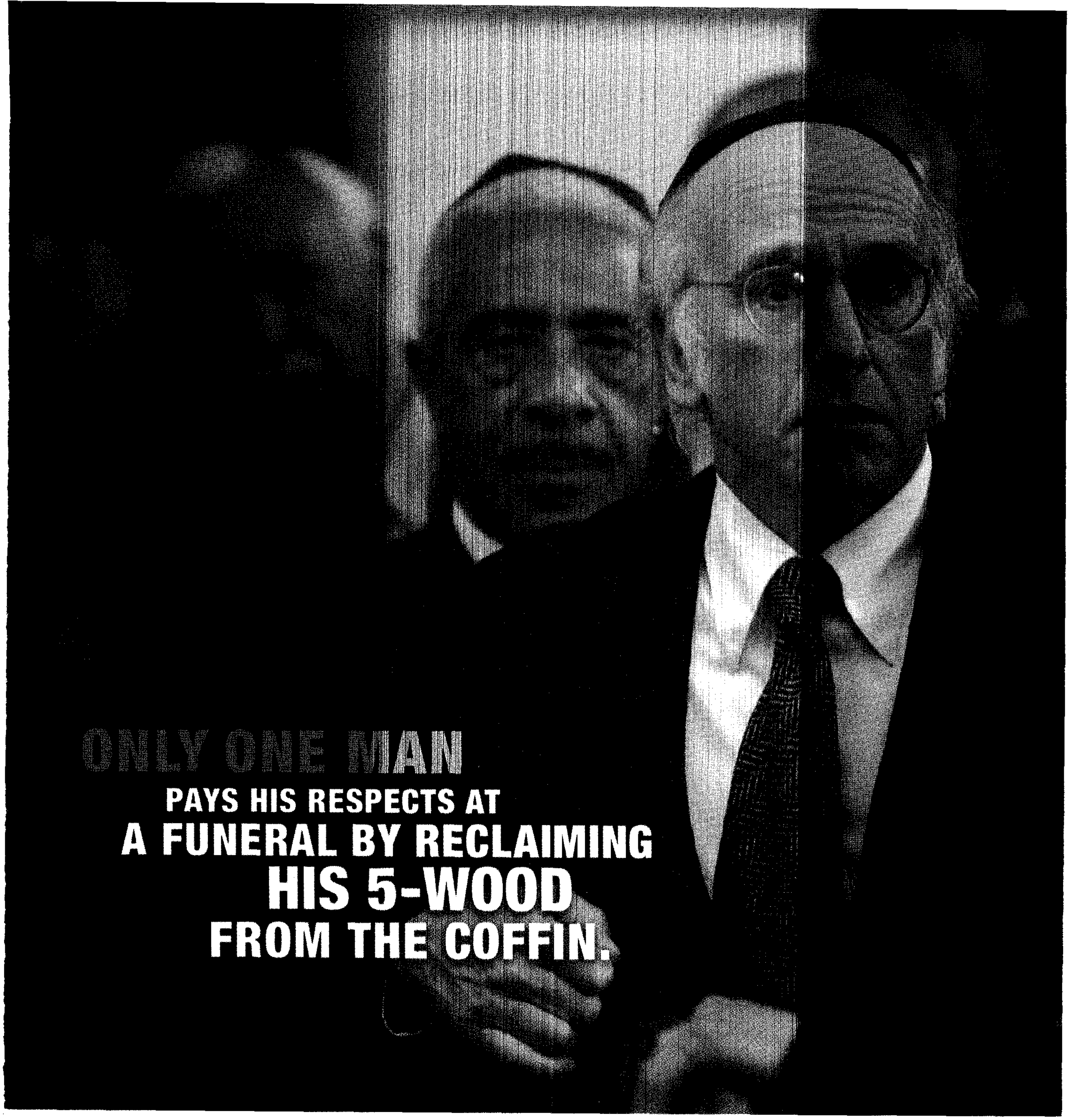
The abbot's garden at the temple of Daisen-in, in Kyoto, is a rectangle of raked gravel bordered by a white wall on one of its long sides, and by the wooden porch of an old pavilion on the other, where the monks meditate. From behind the wall, a camellia bush throws off its scent. The grooves made by the rake run horizontally, like steady but freehand rulings on a blank page, until they eddy around two conical mounds, each about a foot tall. One evening last June, just after the temple had closed, I joined the sitting meditation, the hour-long zazen, held on the porch and open to the public twice a week. There were five other sitters, all Japanese, one a young mother who had her children in tow, two plump boys and a little girl, and I could hear them squirming at the end of the row (the wood creaks)—once or twice the presiding monk spoke to them in a low voice, breaking the silence. But after a while, with an impressive show of stoicism, they managed to keep still.

Tofu's place in the Japanese diet and psyche has been compared to that of bread in France, or of potatoes in Eastern Europe.

HANS GISSINGER

I had been to Daisen-in earlier that week, and at my first sight of the mounds I surprised myself by bursting into tears, perhaps because, for all its austerity, the garden is an image of release: of the moment at which, after an intractable struggle, you get permission from yourself to let the inessential go.

The temples I had come to Japan to visit were of a different sort, though they, too, had a Zen foundation. They were the workshops where tofu is handmade by artisans faithful to the old tradition. Here I should admit that, to a Western palate—mine, at least, unable, despite my best efforts at Daisen-in, to transcend an incorrigible greed for new sensations—even the greatest artisanal tofu didn't produce the kind of epiphany that my first mouthful of white truffle, or of a fruity tomato, or of corn rushed from a field into the pot did. But tofu has been the dietary mainstay of monastic life in Japan for about a millennium—it was imported from China and Korea, along with Buddhism—and it has never lost the soulful, exalted aura of its provenance. In that respect, its relation to the bean curd sold in plastic tubs at American supermarkets is that of a rice cracker to a Communion wafer. Westerners tend to regard tofu as a convenient and perhaps necessary but vaguely pathetic substitute for some less wholesome, more morally dubious carnal indulgence—a rare burger, say. They may even be a bit disdainful of a dish (as they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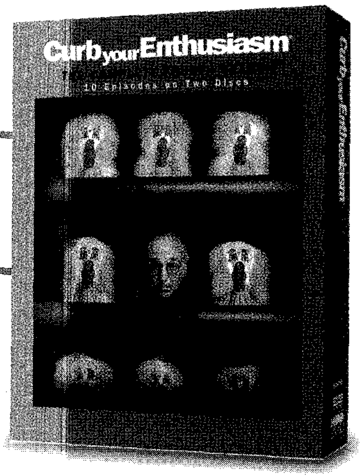
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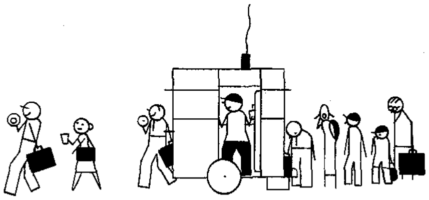
would be of an individual) that, by their standards, lacks an identity, or begs for a disguise. Every tribe, however, has an ancestral food that its exiles yearn for, and that its children can't live without: its manna, which is often soft and white. When a tofu master offers you a slice of bean curd he has just unmolded, he is inviting you to partake, insofar as a stranger can, of what it means to be Japanese.

Okutan is a place congenial to such reflections. It is the oldest tofu *riyori* in Kyoto. The original restaurant was established almost four hundred years ago within the walls of the Nazenji temple, and the current proprietor, Yasuie Ishii, is the fifteenth generation of his family to preside there. He is now in his sixties, but as a young man he bought a villa and its outbuildings—a cluster of thatched pavilions—near the temple of Kiyomizu-dera, with the idea of one day opening a second Okutan. This newer branch sits on the hilly site of a village once owned by the temple's lord. Guests eat at low tables in a tatami room cantilevered over the garden—a lush glade of cherry, cedar, and maple trees. *Mukashi dofu* is the first course on the set menu: a dish from the monastic repertoire. A kneeling waitress prepares it at your table. She sets a clay crock on a charcoal brazier, adds two or three small bricks of *momengoshi* ("cotton" tofu—well drained of moisture and firm in consistency), pours some hot water over them from a kettle, and, after they have simmered for a few minutes (they are not supposed to steep, as they do in the classic hot pot, *yudofu*), she ladles them into a bowl. You then help yourself to a sprinkling of scallions and seven hand-ground spices, and a spoonful of enriched fish stock that contains algae from Hokkaido. The courses that follow observe the principle set by the first: exquisitely bland bean curd, devoid of the bitter or metallic aftertaste that, in the commercial product or its milk, is masked by additives; and served with a refined sauce or paste that sets off its plainness the way a fanciful bijou sets off the elegance of a couture dress. Yet nothing else at Okutan, or perhaps in Japan, rivals the purity of *shima dofu*—an ivory-colored attar of bean curd that arrives on a turquoise plate, with a coral drop of sea-urchin (*uni*) purée, and whose creation is an almost mystical rite.

I was having lunch with a Japanese friend—a native of Kyoto—and after the meal Mr. Ishii introduced himself to us. We chatted briefly about a mutual acquaintance, Hiroko Tanaka, who had arranged the interview. Madam Tanaka is a lithe woman of sixty who dresses in kimonos and wears her dark hair swept high off her pale forehead in a classic pompadour. A fan, a cell phone, and a pack of cigarettes are all tucked neatly into her obi. She has a dancer's carriage and the stage presence of a beauty who has spent her life being looked at. Her theatre was the world of the geisha house. Like many retired geishas (who are called *geikos* in Kyoto), she opened a bar on one of the cobbled backstreets off the river, in the Gion quarter, and she trains a small troupe of teen-age protégées—*maikos*—in the arts and protocol of her former profession.

Though Mr. Ishii is a busy man, he devoted the better part of an afternoon to giving us a course in soybean history and gastronomy. This engaging lesson took place in his tofu kitchens and in his private museum of beans, which is housed in a crypt beneath the restaurant. Beans, he explained, are the seedpods of legumes, which grow on every continent except Antarctica, and *Glycine max* (soya) is one of some twenty thousand species, the majority of which are poisonous. Mr. Ishii has managed to obtain (and, in some cases, to finesse through customs, with the help of airline-pilot friends) about five thousand specimens, along with their flowers, which he displays, mostly for his own enjoyment, in glass bottles and vitrines. He also took us to his studio, in one of the thatched pavilions, where he edits photographs taken on a life of travels to the remote, mostly tropical places where one finds exotic bean stalks like the locust tree and the Calabar. I wondered about this extravagant politesse, until my friend received a cell-phone call from Madam Tanaka. Ishii-san, she said, had once been her admirer. But not even a celebrated geisha could get him off the subject of tofu.



Histories vary, but according to Mr. Ishii the art of extracting a milky liquid from the soybean and turning it into a cheap and versatile solid food by means of a curdling agent—a salt or an acid—was invented in China about two thousand years ago. The Chinese called the dish *dofu* (*do*=curdled; *fu*=bean), a name as basic as the nutrient it described. About seven hundred years later, a delegation of monks studying Chinese Buddhism brought the technique back to Japan with them. Tofu was exclusive to the upper classes (nobles and samurai) and the vegetarian clergy for about five centuries, in part because the labor required to pulverize dried soybeans (*daizu*) by hand, with a mortar and pestle, was too costly. But the advent of the millstone made tofu accessible to common people, and its place in the national diet and psyche has been compared to that of bread in France, or of potatoes in Eastern Europe—a difference being that one cannot live by bread or potatoes alone, whereas tofu (discounting one study, not cited by Mr. Ishii, that links its consumption by middle-aged Japanese-American men to an increased incidence of brain atrophy in old age) is an almost uniquely perfect food: low in calories, high in protein, rich in minerals, devoid of cholesterol, eco-friendly, and complete in the amino acids necessary for human sustenance.

The workshop where Okutan's tofu is made occupies a multichambered grotto beneath the dining rooms which has the chaste and contemplative atmosphere of a chapel. Apart from the plumbing and electrical fixtures, almost no alloyed metal or industrial materials have been used in the construction of the kitchen, or are used in the cooking process, as if they might profane the tofu with their modernity. Nearly all the accoutrements—even the sink—are handmade of cedar, and the stove is a slab of lava. In the kitchen's inner sanctum—the salt room—the regimen of purism is absolute. Adobe walls of clay mixed with rice straw are sheathed in bamboo; the ceiling is tented in thatch; the floor is cobbled with sea stones; and, though the dim light is electric, the bulbs are disguised by old wrought-iron lanterns. Here, Mr. Ishii explained, he distills his *nigari*—the coagulating agent. Salt from the mountains of China is wrapped in straw and suspended from a wooden tripod over a weathered cypress barrel. It absorbs humidity from the walls, and exudes its moisture in an almost imperceptible drip, filling the barrel at the rate of three centimeters a year. Every six months, he adds more salt to the bundles, and if their hemp bindings break he replaces them. Otherwise, they have been hanging undisturbed since he courted Madam Tanaka, about thirty years ago.

Shima dofu, however, is the one variety of bean curd at Okutan that isn't curdled with *nigari*. It is an exceedingly expensive delicacy (about fifty dollars for a few thin slices), and on special occasions Mr. Ishii delivers a provision to the emperor's palace, molded with the imperial mark, a sixteen-petalled chrysanthemum. A dish of great antiquity, it comes from one of tofu's early landfalls in Japan, Ishigakijima—a small island southwest of Okinawa, a hundred and fifty miles from Korea. Mr. Ishii learned the art of making *shima dofu* in his youth, from two old women there.

"*If it please Your Honor . . . Your Honor? Your Honor!*"

• •

If you would like to try whipping up a batch at home, here is the recipe. Negotiate a contract for organic soybeans with a reliable farmer whose fields lie on the slopes of Mt. Hira, in the Shiga Prefecture, where the soil and the water are unpolluted. Make sure that the farmer harvests the beans as late as possible—preferably in December. (Green summer soybeans become edamame, and most commercial soybeans are harvested in the fall. The extra time on the stalk intensifies the flavor.) Pick the beans over carefully, throwing out those eaten by worms—a desirable sign that the farmer isn't cheating with a little DDT. Soak them overnight in very cold spring water. The beans will swell. Rinse them in more of the same, and grind them with a granite mortar, using all your strength, for two hours. Drain the pulp in a bamboo colander, and put the white soy juice you obtain—*gojiu*—to cook on a stone hearth. Let it bubble, subside, and bubble again, several times. (Heating *gojiu*, otherwise known as soy milk, is an essential process that deactivates a toxic substance found in most legumes which blocks digestion.)

Sometime well before you reach this point, however—perhaps while you are waiting for the delivery of your soybeans—hire a boat, and locate the tiny island of Hateruma on your charts (it isn't that far from Ishigakijima). The island is inhabited only by several hundred farmers, who raise sugarcane. Off the coast there is a coral reef (perhaps the sugar farmers can tell you where to find it). You will need a depth finder in good working order, because when the tide is at its lowest ebb you are going to moor the boat and gather the seawater—as Mr. Ishii does—that cascades from the reef, which has an exceptionally rich and complex mineral content. This primordial bouillon is your curdling agent. Add some to the strained *gojiu* (time and failure will teach you the precise amount), stirring with a wooden paddle, and turn the thickened curds into the slatted, four-by-ten-inch cedar boxes that you have lined with a fine-grained cheesecloth. Cover them, weight the covers with blocks of lava—about ten pounds per box—and leave them to drain. Do not, under any circumstances, cool your *shima dofu*, as you would common tofu, by unmolding it in a tank of water, which slimes the skin and dilutes the flavor. What is that flavor? Sublimely unsensational, like a perfectly clarified consommé—which keeps the spirit but discards the substance of the earthy ingredients and patient toil that have gone into it.

Traditional tofu-making in Japan is a nocturnal occupation. At Okutan, the staff starts at 4 A.M., but many artisans show up for work around two, and it is probably a good guess that behind the only lighted windows blazing in a darkened town soybeans are being soaked, ground, boiled, strained, reboiled, curdled, pressed, drained, cooled, sliced, and packaged. So at five o'clock one morning, I rolled off my futon in a lovely old *ryokan*, the Yoyokaku, near the beach in Karatsu, ready for research.

Karatsu is a small provincial city in the Saga Prefecture, about four hours by train from Kyoto, on the spectacularly eroded west coast of Kyushu Island. It is a former whaling port known for its pottery—dun-colored vessels used in the tea ceremony, which are a legacy of Japan's invasions of Korea and of the Korean artisans who returned with their samurai conquerors to settle there in the sixteenth century. The city is also famous for a rowdy, picturesque harvest festival, the Kunchi, which features a parade of gigantic floats and a week of revelry and feasting every November. But off-season it is a quiet backwater, rife with the sort of intrigue that makes for an old-fashioned novel of manners.

By the time I had found my shoes at the front door of the Yoyokaku, and had unlocked my bicycle, the sun was up. I pedalled across a bridge linking the beaches to the mainland, and past Karatsu Castle—a fortified seventeenth-century pagoda that is imposing at a distance, though deplorably restored—which guards the entrance to a bay dotted with misty and misshapen islands. The town was still shuttered, although a few fishmongers and flower sellers were setting up their wares. Downtown Karatsu is Kyoto in miniature: a grid of low, mostly ramshackle timber-and-stucco houses which converges on two glass-vaulted pedestrian arcades, Gofukumachi and Kyomachi.

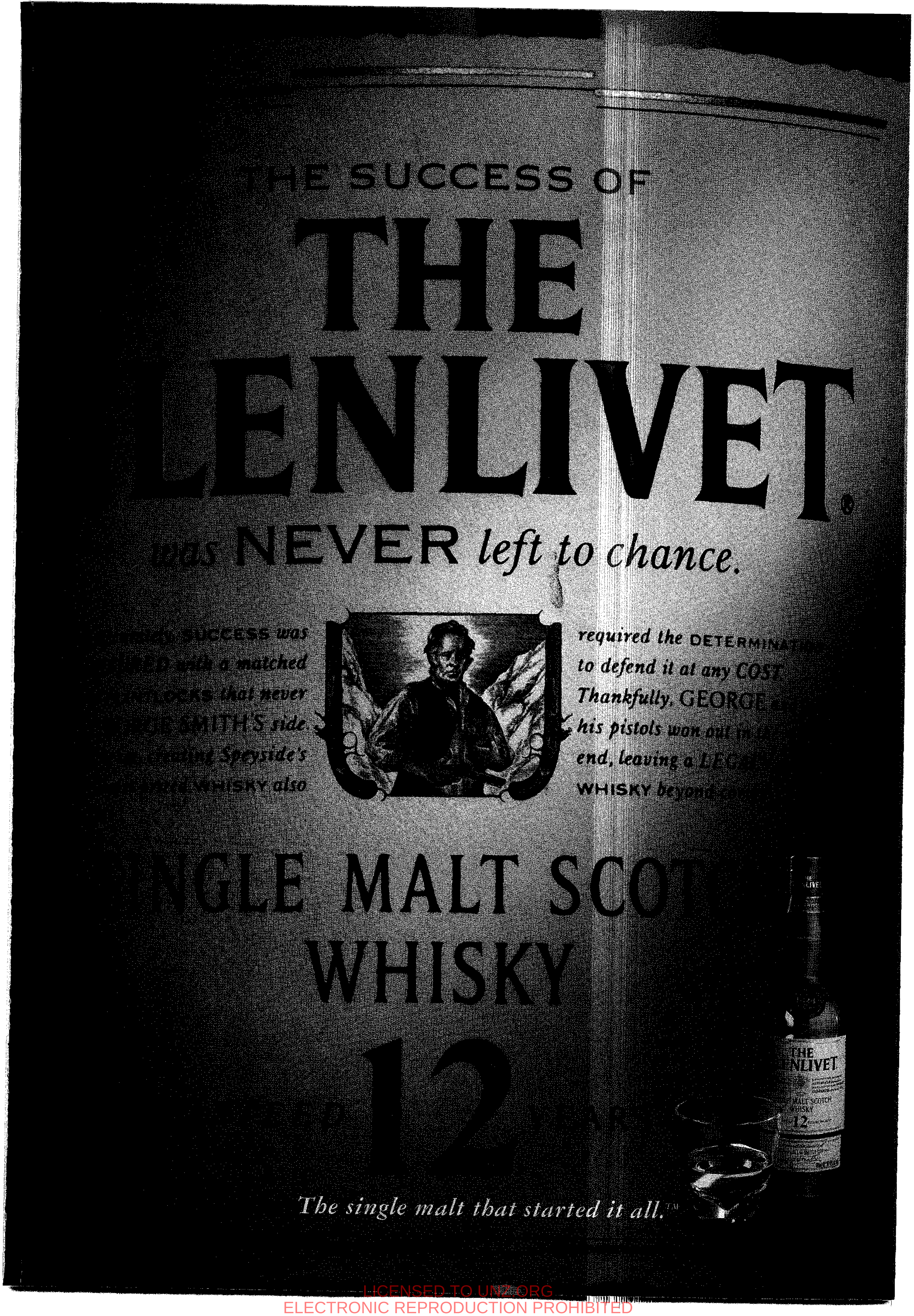
My destination was a tiny restaurant in Kyomachi, which has a gingko counter with ten seats, framed by parchment walls decorated in drippy ink by an inebriated artist. You have to reserve well in advance, and be on time for an early meal (breakfast or brunch), because the service ends at noon, when the exhausted workers go home to sleep. The cuisine consists almost entirely of artisanal tofu made nightly, on the premises, by Yoshimasa Kawashima, an oenophile, chef, organic farmer, philosopher of gastronomy, and devotee of flower arranging and the tea ceremony, whose family has been making tofu in Karatsu for nine generations. He, however, has created his own signature product, *zaru dofu*, a melting, ethereal confection with a mousselike consistency which is eaten with a spoon. It starts out like other artisanal tofu, but one of Kawashima's secrets is his *nigari*—magnesium chloride, which is trickier to use though milder than the more common calcium chloride, which leaves a saline aftertaste. As the creamy curds of *zaru dofu* are setting, they are scooped from the vat and mounded softly into shallow bamboo colanders, where they drain, and in which they are packaged for sale. These appealingly rustic receptacles give Kawashima's delicacy its name (*zaru* means "basket"). It is served in some of Tokyo's best restaurants, and exported to New York by air twice a week, where diners unable to make the twenty-hour journey to Karatsu can try some at Megu, in Tribeca.

That morning, the breakfast menu included white, green, and black *zaru dofu* (the green is a pale celery, and the black a mauvish blue, like a berry gelato) served half a dozen ways: with soft rice and wasabi; with pinches of sea salt or sesame seeds and dribbles of olive oil or tamari; and in a bowl of the thick and fragrant house miso. A side dish of homemade plum pickles accompanied a seared bream, which had probably still been alive when I left the inn. The fish course was followed by a square of "silken" tofu, *kinugoshi*, deep-fried, but custardy on the inside—a contrast in texture that reminded me of crème brûlée (if you can imagine eating crème brûlée with chopsticks). The soybean lees (*okara*) dissolved on the tongue, like the fine shavings of a mild root or nut. *Okara* is the residue of the separation process—the stage at which the boiled soybean pulp is pressed in cheesecloth. It looks like sawdust or wheat germ, and it is often fed to animals or used as fertilizer, but Kawashima considers it worthy to be savored with a sprinkling of fish powder, minced carrot, and Japanese mushrooms. There were two soy-milk desserts: a gelatinous sweet made with sesame paste, and a pot of quivering blancmange.

Kawashima is a large presence in Karatsu: a local boy made good, whose fame, or at least whose tofu, has reached America. At a smoky café with dark woodwork and a polished bar that seemed to have been modelled vaguely on a Greenwich Village coffeehouse, the customers were happy to tell me what they thought of him. One was a stocky, middle-aged woman who had come in for a jolt of caffeine after her tango lesson. She lit a cigarette, as did the waitress and a white-haired gentleman in a business suit. He fled, however, when another woman arrived and settled down with a cigar. The echo of ribald female laughter in the hazy gloom gave the place the atmosphere of a coven. No one seemed surprised that I had flown seven thousand miles to eat *zaru dofu*, but they gave me to understand that Kawashima was a "character," and "very rich"—he had bought "a big estate," a much envied property in the hills, and a beach house, too. There were forty other tofu-makers in the town, but it was hard work, and none of the others made as much money, they said. I tried to buy them a round of espresso, but they wouldn't hear of it. The tango dancer pressed me to accept her fan.

I had also heard around the Yoyokaku that Kawashima owed at least some of his fame to another local luminary, Takashi Nakazato, one of Japan's greatest potters and the scion of a Karatsu dynasty going back thirteen generations, whose patriarch, Taroumon Nakazato, is a Living National Treasure. Nakazato is a noted gastronome who has helped to make a number of reputations, particularly those of sushi chefs and sake brewers. His original enthusiasm for Kawashima's *zaru dofu* piqued the interest of the press. But the two men had quarrelled, it was said, over some matter of etiquette, and their falling-out seemed to enthrall the town. When I met Nakazato, he was at work on a huge urn in a serene, barnlike studio with high rafters and mullioned windows. The light was streaming in, and his assistants were silently prepping a rack of pots for firing. Their master is a slight man of sixty-eight, with a noble head, and his intense containment—a stillness of eye and body while his deft hands move—gives him a sagelike aura. When I asked Nakazato about Kawashima, he slowly looked up from his wheel. "I love food," he said laconically. "I know a young sushi chef in the pine forest. Do you know the pine forest? You should go there." There was a long pause. "There is lots of great tofu in Japan."

Kawashima bounded into the res-



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Conant's signature style of distilling complex techniques and ingredients into refined dishes with strong, clean flavors first won rave reviews when he opened L'Impero in 2002. His cuisine neither replicates regional Italian recipes nor Old World sensibilities, but evokes the romantic appeal of the Italian lifestyle. Conant's roast baby goat, for example, has been singled out for flavors as irresistible as the caramelized meat juices the chef loved to scrape from his mother's cast-iron pan. Conant bastes the goat with a wine-nuanced sauce; its succulence rests on a bed of crisp potatoes seasoned with speck.

When Conant opened Alto this year, he raised the bar for *alta cucina*, the term for highly refined Italian cuisine, drawing inspiration for his menu from the lesser-known regions of Northern Italy. Here Conant's focus is like a jeweler's. In the Piedmontese *Agnolotti* called *Plin*, for example, the thimble-sized ravioli are carefully filled with Fontina cheese, braised meats, and truffles.

Conant's innovative cooking embodies the best of *cucina rustica* and *alta cucina*—a balance of sophistication and simplicity mastered after years of exploring the full range of Italian cooking. Conant claims both the rustic and the exquisite express New Italian cuisine. "What's important is that every plate is honest and soulful," he says. "My ambition is the goodness of the food."

The title of Conant's pioneering cookbook, "New Italian Cooking," out next month (Broadway Books), bears the headline of what he has achieved—a reimagining of the temptations of a classic cuisine.

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Tastier than the chocolates French diners
Eat at evening, and old pleasures abundant
As Turkish pears picked in the garden in August.

—*Robert Bly*

taurant at about eight, as his pretty wife, Keiko, was clearing away the Nakazato pottery on which breakfast is served—rust-and-ash-colored vessels with a dark underglaze and a primal beauty. Tofu-making may have a Zen gestalt, but Kawashima—a sporty fifty-eight-year-old with a goatee and a crewcut—doesn't make a monklike impression. He is the sort of character the French call a *gaillard*—a bon vivant bristling with rakish vigor. One keeps up with him at a fast trot. His cottage-scale factory and offices occupy a warren of rooms in a sombre two-hundred-year-old house, with blackened beams, which survived demolition when the arcade was built, and seems out of synch with its festive swags of plastic wisteria. At the back of a rather cramped, unlovely industrial kitchen, baskets of *zaru dofu* were moving down a conveyor belt, getting wrapped and labelled. (The tofu is handmade, and strictly organic, but the packaging is mechanized, and a small fleet of white delivery vans was waiting at the loading dock.) Kawashima's younger brother was dressed in kitchen whites, stirring soy milk in a metal vat. It was warm but hadn't been curdled yet, and he offered me some from the ladle. Its taste was slightly beany, yet elemental, with an ineffable sweetness, as if it came not from a plant but from a breast.

"I've started showing up late," Kawashima told me. "At around three, to give my brother some breathing room. He's learning the ropes, and the only way you do that is by yourself." Kawashima's elder son has also decided to become a tofu-maker, after a brief stint at Gateway Computers. "I didn't oblige him," Kawashima says. "I told him, on the contrary, to get away from home, the way I did. In my late teens, I left Karatsu for Fukuoka"—the nearest large city—"and worked at another tofu place, to see how they did things. I studied *chabana,* flower arranging, and learned to make tea—my business for ten years. When I came home, I wanted to create something new with tofu." A sudden loud clatter made me start: Kawashima had just pulled down a steel trapdoor in the ceiling, and he shooed me up the ladder. Under the eaves, he has built a tearoom for himself.

In the next two hours, making the rounds with Kawashima, I got to see quite a bit of his enterprise and its fruits. Having asked me if I liked dogs, he took me to his beach house—a Hamptons-style bungalow in an upscale enclave near the castle—where we played with his St. Bernard. Then we drove ten miles out of town, through strawberry fields, and up into the hills, where Kawashima owns several acres. We fed the fat koi in his pond, and tramped through the woods to admire his Shinto shrine, an altar guarded by two gaping stone dogs, one of which catches evil intentions, while the other spits out good luck. I helped him open the elaborately engineered stone sluices that irrigate his kitchen garden, where he stopped to do a little puttering. His wife doesn't like the country, he confided, so this is his bachelor kingdom, and he bought it with his "pocket money," because she also wouldn't like him spending the profits of their business on it. All his crops—tomatoes, melons, eggplants, cherries, a few beans (for edamame), and some white lettuce—are organically grown, as is the rice that he is seeding, experimentally, in a blanket of cotton, to keep down the weeds.

Though I normally don't start drinking at ten in the morning, I had the excuse that it was nine in the evening (of the night before) by my body clock, and Kawashima is a persuasive host. "I think I was born to make people happy," he said. So, having tasted some of his homemade plum wine, we sat at the kitchen table of his farmhouse, chasing our aperitif with a bottle of excellent Chapelle-Chambertin '96, while Kawashima reminisced, as oenophiles do, about the great vintages he has owned and drunk—an '81 Pétrus, some venerable Lafites—and what he ate with them. His memory stirred, he ducked into a walk-in wine cellar, the size of a bank vault, and came back, looking very pleased, with a Château d'Yquem '21. I wrestled with my conscience before urging him, with feigned conviction, not to open it.

The farmhouse is built in the traditional style, with shoji windows and a tiled roof curling up at the edges, though its amenities are from a glossy shelter magazine. It sits on a rise overlooking a valley of terraced rice paddies that were simmering under an opaque sky and waiting for the spring rains—a timeless scene only somewhat spoiled by a fretwork of electric pylons. A little farther up the slope, Kawashima has added a luxurious bath pavilion that, like his kitchen, is a sybaritic gadgeteer's paradise. (The plumbing responds to voice commands.) The tub is in a sort of turret penthouse with glass walls which faces a deep forest furrowed by ravines and inhabited by wild boar and monkeys. When Kawashima is soaking there, he says, he sometimes sees a constellation of impudent simian eyes staring at him through the glass.

I doubted that *zaru dofu*, or any other sort of tofu, not even *shima dofu*, would have enough character to hold its own with a great Burgundy like the one we were drinking. But wine and bean curd, Kawashima's twin passions, are more compatible than you might think. To prove the point, he served us a little *amuse-gueule* that he devised for wine-tastings: a wedge of dense and pungent saffron-colored *miso zuke dofu*, which is a block of *momengoshi* steeped in fermented miso, wrapped in *konbu* (a form of kelp with a thick, ridged leaf which, in its dried form, resembles a slice of rubber tire tread), and aged for months. At last, some tofu with bite: an alarming, even macho one, like that of a Roquefort at the limit of ripeness.

If you don't speak Japanese, travelling alone in provincial Japan is not for the timid: the lingua franca is pantomime. I mastered the greetings, which change according to the time of day; a few adjectives (though I got into trouble with *oishii*—delicious—which may have a lewd connotation in the wrong context); and I learned to count. So finding the Yoyokaku had been a stroke of luck. The motherly proprietress, Harumi Okochi, whose husband's family have been innkeepers in Karatsu for more than a century, is a former English teacher with a nuanced command of the language, and of the local society and folklore. Her library overlooks a rock garden and a waterfall, and, after I had bathed in the ryokan's communal tub and wrapped myself in a blue-and-white *yukata*, she poured me some tea and we sat reading poetry—paeans to tofu. She asked me if I knew the "Manyoshu" ("Assembly of Ten Thousand Leaves"), an anthology of literary treasures collected in the eighth century. "Some of its earliest verse," she said, "was written on Kashiwajima, an island you can see from the tower of the castle, and the fishermen there may have been among the first Japanese to make bean curd. According to legend, their tofu was so hard that it could break stones. That is what they still call it: *ishiwari*—stone-breaking—*dofu*. Though I have lived here all my life, I have never tasted it."

Kashiwajima is a worn, whale-shaped lump of volcanic rock boiling with greenery. Its love poets were the soldiers of a lonely garrison, watching the sea for Korean war galleys, thirteen hundred years ago, and pining for their wives. One afternoon, I hired a launch from a pier near the castle. It bounced across the swell while I clung to the guardrail with white knuckles. Mrs. Okochi, who had changed from a kimono into a pair of cotton trousers, sat primly unperturbed in the cabin, watching for flying fish, and holding a beautifully wrapped box of sweets from the inn, which she'd thought to bring as a gift for the chief tofu-maker, Hiromi Takahira, who had agreed to reopen her workshop for us at an ungodly hour: 3 P.M.

The little marina was deserted, though from somewhere nearby we heard the sounds of karaoke. There wasn't a teahouse or a store in sight, so we meandered around the waterfront until we found the workshop, in a corrugated shed on one of the piers. Pampas grass, wild hollyhocks, and thistle were growing by the front door, and the place, like the island generally, had a melancholy air. Kashiwajima has always been dependent on the sea, but in recent times it has lost many of its young people to jobs on the mainland. The elders who remain, however, are a hardy lot. An *uni* fisherman with white hair and a deep tan, who squatted in a doorway on sinewy haunches while mending his nets, was looking for a wife, he told Mrs. Okochi, eying her hopefully. "You should meet my sister," he added, waving down an elderly cyclist laden with buoys and baskets—Kashiwajima's last female abalone diver. She was pedalling home in a ratty wetsuit and a faded bonnet, toothless and cheerful, though also a little embarrassed, she told Mrs. Okochi, to be seen with such a puffy face. That, she explained, is what happens when you plug your ears and hold your breath long enough to catch a snap-jawed mollusk clinging to a reef thirty feet down.

At the workshop, Mrs. Takahira, a seventy-one-year-old fisherman's widow with a round face and a radiant complexion (tofu and hard labor are her beauty secrets, she said) welcomed us with a deep bow. The windows of the shed were open, and the sea breeze carried a scent of rain, wildflowers, and algae. Before her marriage, she told us, she worked on her parents' farm, growing soybeans, and then she became a nurse in Karatsu. After her husband died, and her two sons left home, they told her to stop making tofu for herself—it was too much trouble. But about five years ago she decided that the island should exert "more of an effort to show the world that we exist," she said. "In the olden days, we were known for our *ishiwari dofu*. People made it for funerals and weddings, and it was eaten in a fish broth. Now they're too busy. I started thinking that maybe it could be revived. A few friends said they would help, and the Karatsu town council gave us some marketing advice. There are sixteen of us, and we take shifts."

Stone-breaking tofu got its name, according to Mrs. Takahira, because one day an islander walking home dropped her basket and spilled her tofu. "It didn't crumble, but the stone it fell on did," she said. "You can believe that or not, but it's very concentrated. We use five times as many soybeans for the same amount of tofu as other makers do, and organic Japanese *daizu* is three times as expensive as American beans, so we don't make much profit. They passed a law saying you can't use the local ocean water as a *nigari* anymore—because of the pollution—so we buy evaporated natural sea salt from O-Shima, and that's what makes it so hard. But too much salt turns your tofu bitter, and if you overcook it, it stinks."

The only concession Mrs. Takahira makes to convenience, or age, is to pulverize the soybeans in an electric grinder. Otherwise, her tofu-making is powered entirely by muscle. She presses the *okara* with wooden rolling pins, then squeezes it like an Old World washerwoman wringing linen sheets. Each of the molds is compressed for forty minutes with a twenty-pound weight that she slings about with one hand as if it were a can of tuna fish. When she turns out the bricks of bean curd, their surface is crackled, like parched desert clay. Their texture is a bit grainy, and they offer some faint resistance to a knife. They are thoroughly *oishii*, though, with an intense soy flavor and the definitive, though unplaceable, sweetness that artisanal tofu seems to share, and which, like the scent of lotus blossoms in a folktale, signals the presence of an unseen divinity. ♦

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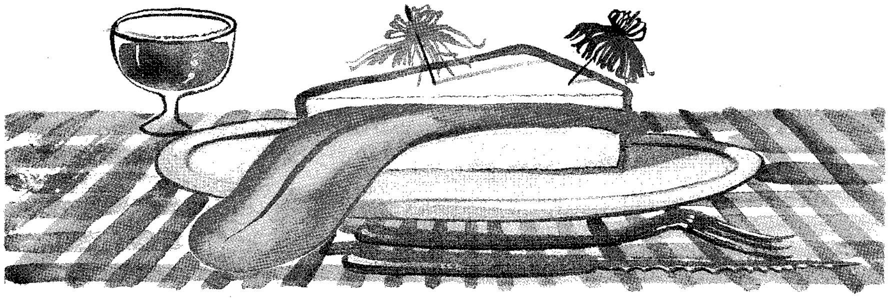
TABOOS

TONGUE

At some point in my culinary life, I decided that if I liked to eat something I should know how to cook it. Tongue remained on my list for a long time, perhaps because I associated it with death. I first encountered it on sandwich platters after family funerals. The sandwiches were cut into triangles, and secured with toothpicks wearing hula skirts of green or orange cellophane. The other choices were corned beef or pastrami, but it was tongue I was after. My only rivals were an aunt or two; my brother and sister wouldn't go near it.



RUBEN TOLEDO

But the first time I saw a whole severed tongue was this summer, in my kitchen. I had recently made a spread out of old cheese ends, and, wondering what other odd things I could make palatable, I recalled a recipe for potted tongue with ginger. Tongue's time had come—I would make a tongue dinner. When I couldn't find the potted-tongue recipe, I called the Kitchen Arts & Letters bookstore, whose staff is always ready to help a cook at a loss. The paste, they said, called for smoked tongue, preserved ginger, and fresh sage, pounded in a mortar. There was a pause. Did I know that this concoction was invented by Norman Douglas, who was known for never trying his recipes? Undeterred, I called the butcher: a three-pound smoked beef tongue and a raw calf's tongue could be mine. "Are you sure you want all this?" he asked. He, too, paused. "It's disgusting."

The next morning, a heavy brown package arrived, in which a tongue shape was unmistakable. I stuck it in the refrigerator, feeling suddenly exhausted. What was I going to do with it all? Tongue with ginger first, then the calf's tongue and the smoked tongue, served separately? Simon Hopkinson, the English cook, had suggestions for appropriate sauces. I considered, briefly, antique recipes ("Potage of Larks," which was "served with beef tongue, lamb broth, and lemons"), but even I, in my elevated state, could foresee difficulties. There were also the limitations of the guest list—I would choose diners for their adventurism, but, just possibly, not everyone was going to enjoy this.

The next day, when our house guest, Mary, went out, I asked her to pick up a chocolate dessert on her way home—a consolation prize. Around noon, I opened the package from the butcher. The smaller tongue was nestled against the big one. It was mauve, and the skin was like fine sandpaper. I put it in a pot, covered it with cold water, averted my eyes, and turned on the flame. According to Hopkinson, a skewer inserted into the thickest part of a cooked calf's tongue will meet no resistance. Thank God for that, I thought, and turned my attention to the big one. It was scaly, rigid, bright red. The hard curved tip was two inches wide. I went to the bookcase. "A smoked tongue," I read, "must be soaked for twelve hours." I called the butcher's again. I didn't have to soak it, but I did have to boil it. The first pot I took out was too small: the smoked tongue was the size of a piglet. The calf's tongue had started to simmer, bobbing slightly. To distract myself, I bruised juniper berries for a *sauce charcutière*. Then I heard my youngest child, returning from the playground. She looked into the pot. "Can I touch it?" she asked. I nodded. "Scratchy," she said. "What is it?" I told her. "Sad," she said, shaking her head.

By 7 P.M., six of us were assembled in the garden. I had mentioned only a culinary experiment. Drinks materialized. I excused myself; both tongues, now cooked, needed to be skinned. A pale rubbery layer peeled off the calf's tongue. The smoked tongue had turned brown, and blistered. I quickly pounded some smoked tongue into the ginger, and brought it out, accompanied by toast rounds. "What's that?" Tom, who travels a lot and has eaten things like bats'-head soup, asked suspiciously. I told him. Quiet descended. "Is this the experiment?" I nodded and explained. Apart from our eldest child, Anna (not one piece, she swore, would pass her lips), everyone had seconds. It tasted vaguely of hot dog. Dinner proceeded. There was a plate of gray flannelette calf's tongue, and one of primrose smoked tongue. The salad disappeared. I had been tasting the meat as I sliced it, and by now I had eaten more than I had in my entire childhood. I felt sick. There was enough left over to feed twenty. The cats prowled under the table. "Cat got your tongue?" Anna asked. The chocolate cake was a success. We cleaned up. It was a hot night, and hard to sleep. At 1 A.M., there was a knock at the bedroom door. It was Mary, who must have had an allergic reaction: her tongue was swelling. She had called her doctor, who told her to go to the nearest emergency room. "I'm fine," she said, white-faced, through strangled lips.

—*Cynthia Zarin*

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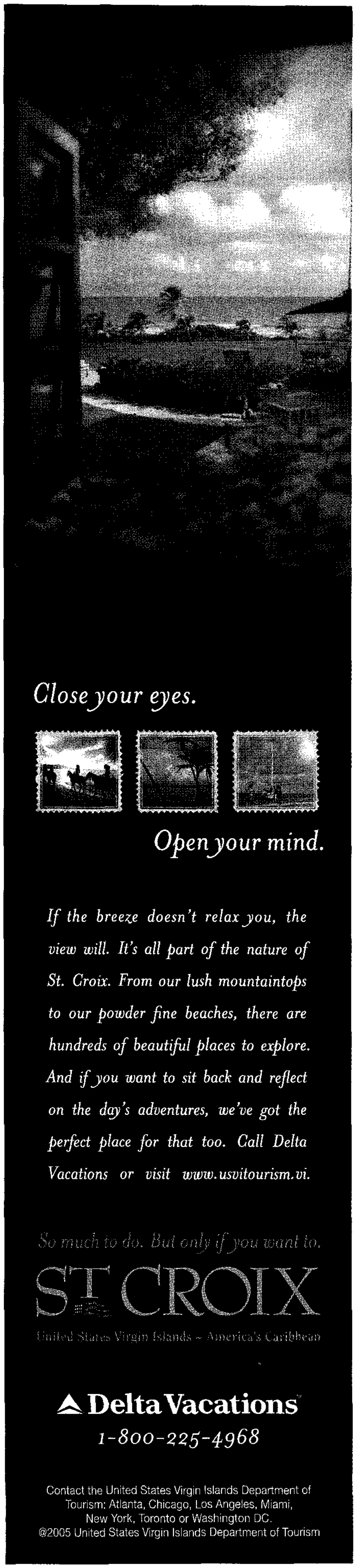
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PROFILES

GONE FISHING

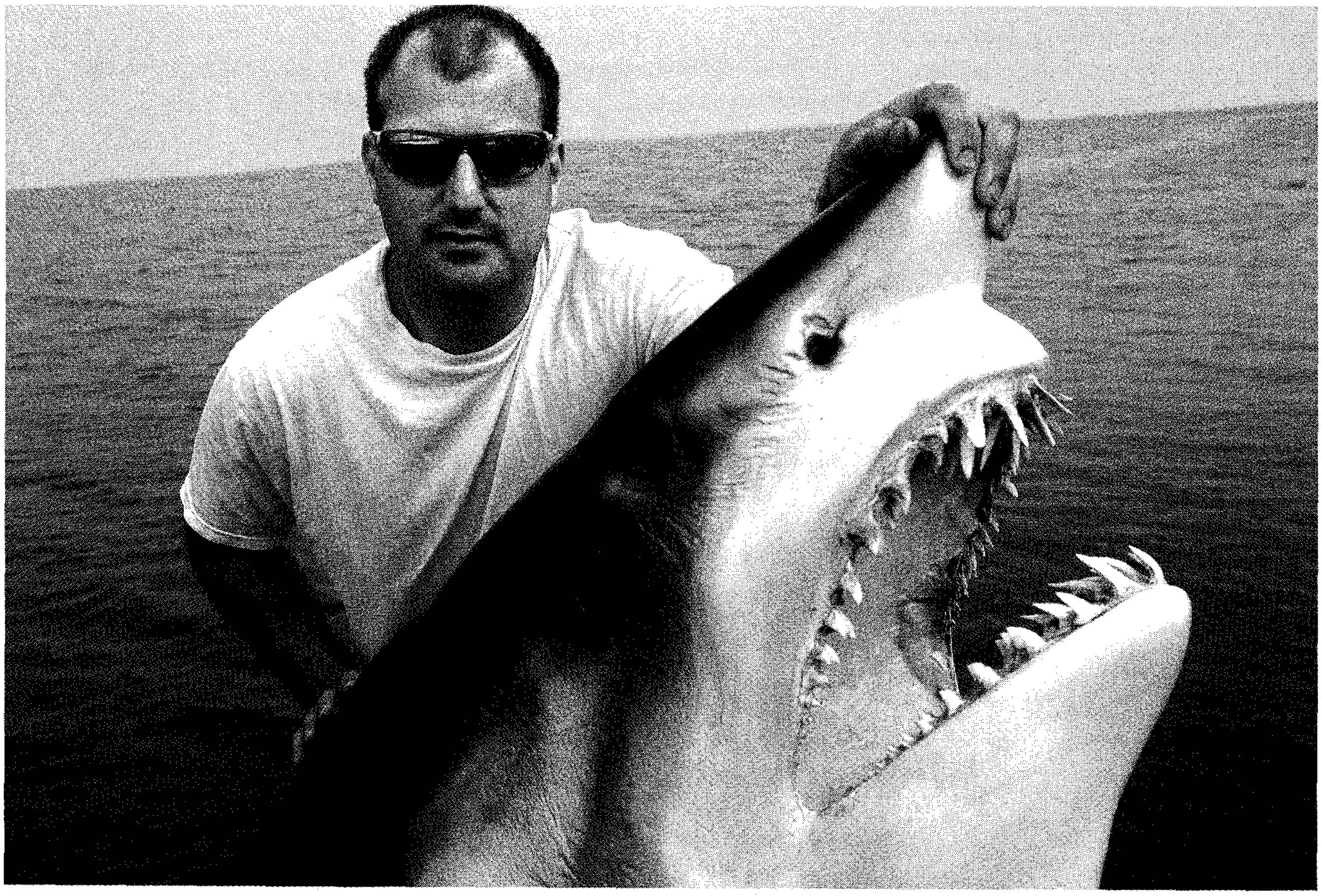
The chef who catches your dinner.

BY MARK SINGER

A poll that I recently conducted among several of David Pasternack's friends and colleagues yielded a nearly unanimous result. The question was: if Dave were a fish, what kind would he be? The answer was: a tuna. One respondent, Artie Hoernig, a commercial fisherman who also operates a retail fish market and restaurant in Island Park, New York, was more specific. "Absolutely a bluefin tuna," he said, referring to a species that I'd heard Pasternack characterize as "like a freight train swimming in the ocean." A minority opinion from his father, Mel ("striped bass—wild, big, good fighter"), dovetailed with Dave's own measured self-appraisal: "Half tuna, half striper, I guess. Tuna for the thrill of the chase, the hunt. I love to catch a tuna. And striped bass is the king of the fish inshore. It's our native fish, and I grew up catching 'em, you know." He went on, "Basically, I've fished my whole life. I started fishing with my father when I was about five, in Jamaica Bay, off of Floyd Bennett Field, in Brooklyn. Snapper, bluefish, blowfish, flounder. I fished regularly with a guy named Captain Lou. I always fished with older guys. It was, like, somebody would introduce me and they'd take me under their wing. People don't necessarily do that anymore, which is too bad, because that's how you learn—'You're tying it *that* way? No, you tie it *that* way.' If you wanna catch a lot of fish, you've gotta take an aggressive approach. And what's the point of fishing if you don't wanna catch 'em?"

Pasternack is the chef and co-creator of Esca, a five-year-old fish restaurant on West Forty-third Street, in Manhattan. His recipes are unaffectedly refined, and he defines his culinary creativity in elliptical, prosaic terms: "It's passion, plus knowing when something needs a little something"—the emblem of a cook, or, for that matter, any artist who knows what to put in and what to leave out. A focussed, sensible fellow, he understands the fish business better than just about anyone, in ways intuitive, visceral, and pragmatic. Before dawn one spring morning at the Fulton Fish Market, as we were admiring a machete-wielding Ecuadorean who, with the celerity of a Jedi, was quartering and trimming a mattress-sized yellowfin tuna, Pasternack noticed a neatly pressed silver-haired gent standing nearby. He said to me softly, "A good old-fashioned 'made' guy. Nice guy. But he's notorious. The market was run by 'em for years, until they passed the RICO laws and then these guys were supposed to be banned. I'm surprised to see him here, even though he owns the business. And if you print the name of the business I'll have no glass left in my windows."

Local climate and geography have surprisingly little bearing upon the experience of eating in New York. The foods most closely identified with the city at street level—pizza, pastrami, pretzel, dim sum, falafel—all made their way here on immigrant tides. And the past decade has witnessed an exoticism that often seems more than a little forced. When a phenomenon like Jean-Georges Vongerichten creates an empire in Manhattan, his ambition—which presumes, of course, that a critical mass of people will ante up the equivalent of a mortgage payment for a meal—reflects a high-wire determination to move far beyond his Alsatian roots. (French-Thai fusion! Malay-Thai street food!) Pasternack happens to be Jewish and Esca happens to be resolutely Italian (if unlike any other Italian restaurant in the city). Whatever. Compared with New York's other celebrated chefs, he has stayed unusually close to home; Esca is, among other things, the direct consequence of his years of experience with a rod and reel. Pasternack lives in Long Beach and, for a while,



David Pasternack, of Esca. As much as a New York-born-and-bred chef can, he has thrived by cooking best what he knows best.

HANS GISSINGER

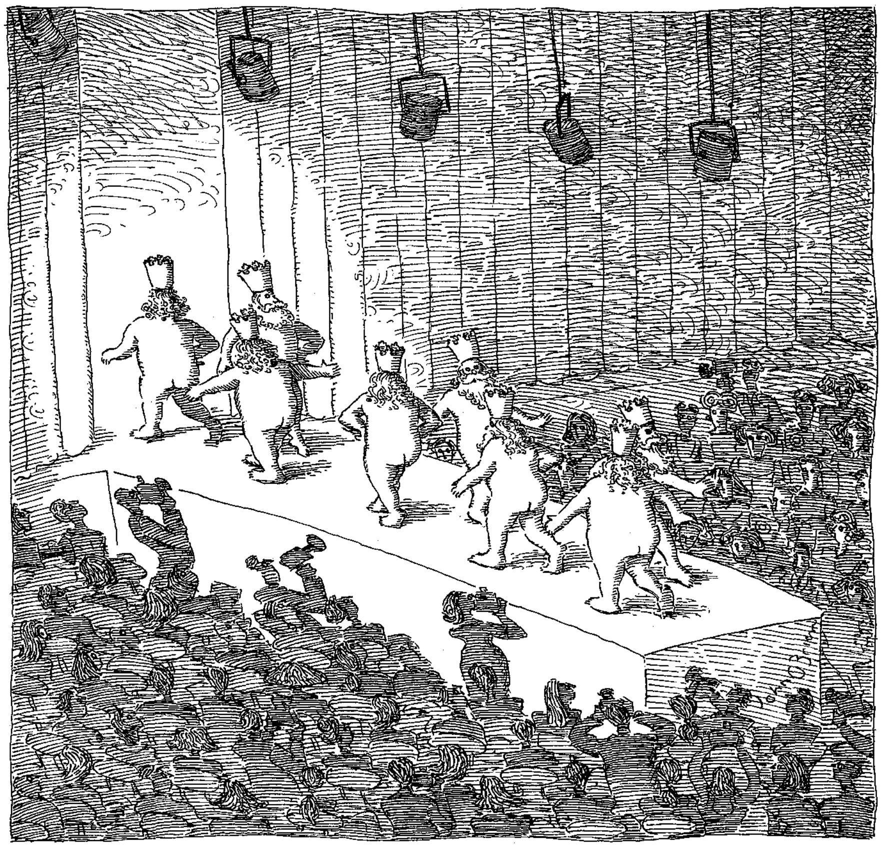
had a habit of schlepping to Esca, on the Long Island Rail Road, plastic garbage bags containing fish that he'd caught the previous day. "But I'd be exhausted by the time I made the walk from Penn Station," he said. So he persuaded his wife, Donna Peltz, to make deliveries in their 1988 Toyota sedan, which she did until two years ago, when he decided that he could justify investing in a truck. No other restaurant in the city—not now and presumably not ever—offers year-round wild game that has been personally bagged by the chef.

Before Esca ("bait," in Italian), Pasternack worked for two decades in a succession of mostly French-themed New York restaurants, bistros, and brasseries, and before that he attended culinary school at Johnson & Wales, in Providence, Rhode Island. During his year and a half in Providence, he drove every weekend to his home town, Rockville Centre, a Nassau County suburb only a few miles inland (or only a madeleine-like sea breeze) from the South Shore of Long Island. Then, after he found work and began living in Manhattan, he stayed connected to the old neighborhood by renting a room or an apartment close to the beach. As often as he could manage, he spent his days off fishing, in the bays and inlets and in the wide-open Atlantic, from the Rockaways to Montauk Point. He took stripers, tuna, flounder, fluke, sea bass, porgies, cod, weakfish, bluefish, mackerel, the inadvertent shark—in his concise inventory, "whatever swam." Though there's no mistaking Pasternack for a literary type, spending time with him got me thinking about the way a chef's evolution can mirror that of a novelist. In the same way that a fiction writer can rely upon the dictum "write about what you know," Pasternack, as much as a New York-born-and-bred chef can, has thrived by cooking best what he knows best.

In the differentiation between executive chefs, celebrity chefs, and working chefs, Pasternack is plainly in his element in the third category. He doesn't have a cell phone or respond to e-mail, but he's easy to get hold of. His office, in effect, is the same spot in the kitchen where he cuts fish, orders supplies, conceives menus, plates food, and supervises his staff. He's at Esca five, sometimes six days a week, typically from 10 A.M. to 11 P.M. Though he rents a pied-à-terre on the East Side, most nights he takes the train home to Long Beach, where he and Donna live with their year-old daughter, Ruby, in a red brick and rose stucco bungalow with a detached garage. My first glimpse inside the garage was a moment of recognition: suspended from the rafters were two punching bags. Days when Pasternack is neither working nor fishing, he likes to ride his bicycle along the Long Beach boardwalk—it extends nearly two and a half miles—and then spend a half hour thumping the heavy bags. On or off the job, whether he's giving instructions in Spanglish to a fish cleaner ("Antonio, you're gonna take this *abajo* and this *abajo* and you're gonna keep 'em *separado,* O.K.?") or butchering a side of veal or setting the hook in a fish that's on the line, he has the authority of a nimble middleweight, at once firmly grounded and light on his feet. He's five nine, with powerful arms and shoulders and a creeping waistline. At forty-one, he looks his age. He has short light-brown hair that's receding and thinning at the crown, a nose you notice, broad cheeks, a strong jaw, blue-gray eyes, and often a slightly weary demeanor. His smile is wry and asymmetrical, listing toward starboard. About every third day, he's clean-shaven.

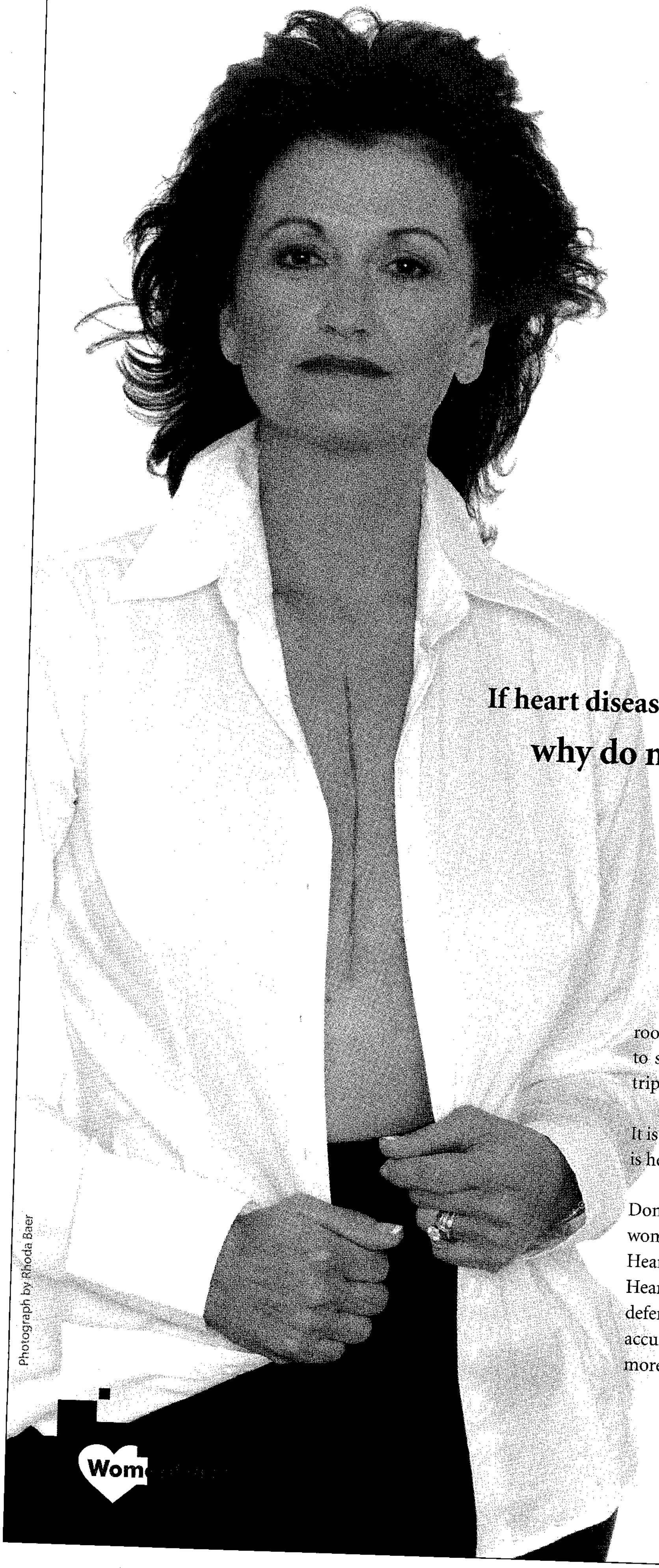
The kitchen at Esca is relatively small—two levels, six hundred square feet in all—but for the twenty or so prep cooks, line cooks, runners, and dishwashers who circulate during peak hours, it probably feels less crowded than others they've worked in, because the boss isn't inclined toward histrionics or harangues. He speaks in a low, even register, with an inflection and delivery that are pure South Shore, which is basically blue-collar Brooklynese that's moved farther out on Long Island. "St. Francis said you have to speak in the vernacular, and that's Dave," Mel Pasternack, a semi-retired trial attorney, told me. "When he talks to a fishmonger, he speaks fishspeak."

"The fish business is very complicated, very complicated," Dave says when the conversation turns to catch limits, size limits, quotas for different species in different jurisdictions, and the vagaries of a marketplace in which the law of supply and demand regularly conflicts with conservation laws that often strike commercial fishermen as impractical and convoluted. In general, his sympathies lie with the fishermen. Which is to say that Pasternack is a resourceful guy who has cultivated mutually beneficial relationships with certain other guys: "My striped-bass guy called this morning. . . . I was talking to a guy who just came back from Florida. He was snook fishing every day. . . . Whenever Mike goes cod fishing, I'm his guy. . . . The way they ship stuff now is pretty amazing. Here, try this opah. It's also called moonfish. Fatty, right? A lot of natural fat to it. Kinda has that tuna texture? With a completely different flavor. Very buttery, almost swordfishy. Opah comes from somewhere in the Pacific. I can speak to a guy, he'll call me at eleven or twelve o'clock, the fish'll be here when I get here the next morning. . . . A lot about buying fish is spontaneity. A guy called me yesterday and told me what he had and what he recommended. You'd have to be an idiot to buy what he didn't recommend. I talked to a guy this morning, he was unloading a boat of monkfish. I bought some of the monkfish livers from him, to make pâté. He also had big jumbo scallops. And I bought a box of blackfish from him. . . . I called my crab guy last week. To find out when he's gonna have blue claws and softshells. He told me to call him back in a month. I call guys all the time."



The great majority of restaurants in the city, from cozy to corporate, buy all their fish through a single supplier. Pasternack deals with at least fifty: brokers; wholesalers; gill-netters; dredgers; and pinhook, or rod-and-reel, anglers. On any given day, salmon might arrive from Alaska; abalone and black cod from British Columbia; giant clams from Puget Sound; mahogany clams, sea urchins, and diver scallops from Maine; spot prawns from Santa Barbara; pink snapper and John Dory from New Zealand; yellowtail from Japan or California; red snapper, pompano, mahi-mahi, and grouper from the Gulf of Mexico; sardines from Portugal or California; scorpionfish, branzino, orata, and calamari from the Mediterranean; red mullet from Senegal; Arctic char from Iceland; octopus from South Carolina, Portugal, or Thailand; halibut, hake, skate, monkfish, fluke, flounder, kingfish, weakfish, sea bass, striped bass, scallops, sole, and tuna from up and down the East Coast; oysters from Long Island, Rhode Island, Maine, the Canadian Maritimes. Almost all of it is wild, and none of it has ever been frozen, nor will it be. (The freezer at Esca, no larger than a domestic fridge, is reserved for pasta and desserts.) The fish travel by truck, express mail, air freight, courier, U.P.S. Some arrive at the kitchen still flopping.

Pasternack speaks almost daily with Rod Mitchell, the owner of Browne Trading Company, in Portland, Maine, where hundreds of boats a month unload at the Portland Fish Exchange, the largest display fish auction in the country. Mitchell, who has been described as the "fish purveyor to the stars" but prefers to call himself a "fish picker," combines his talent for scrutinizing individual fish with a global overview of the seafood trade, and he regards Pasternack as an ideal customer. "Dave's quest is to have as many different kinds of fish as he can and still be able to sell them all," he told me. "He wants to



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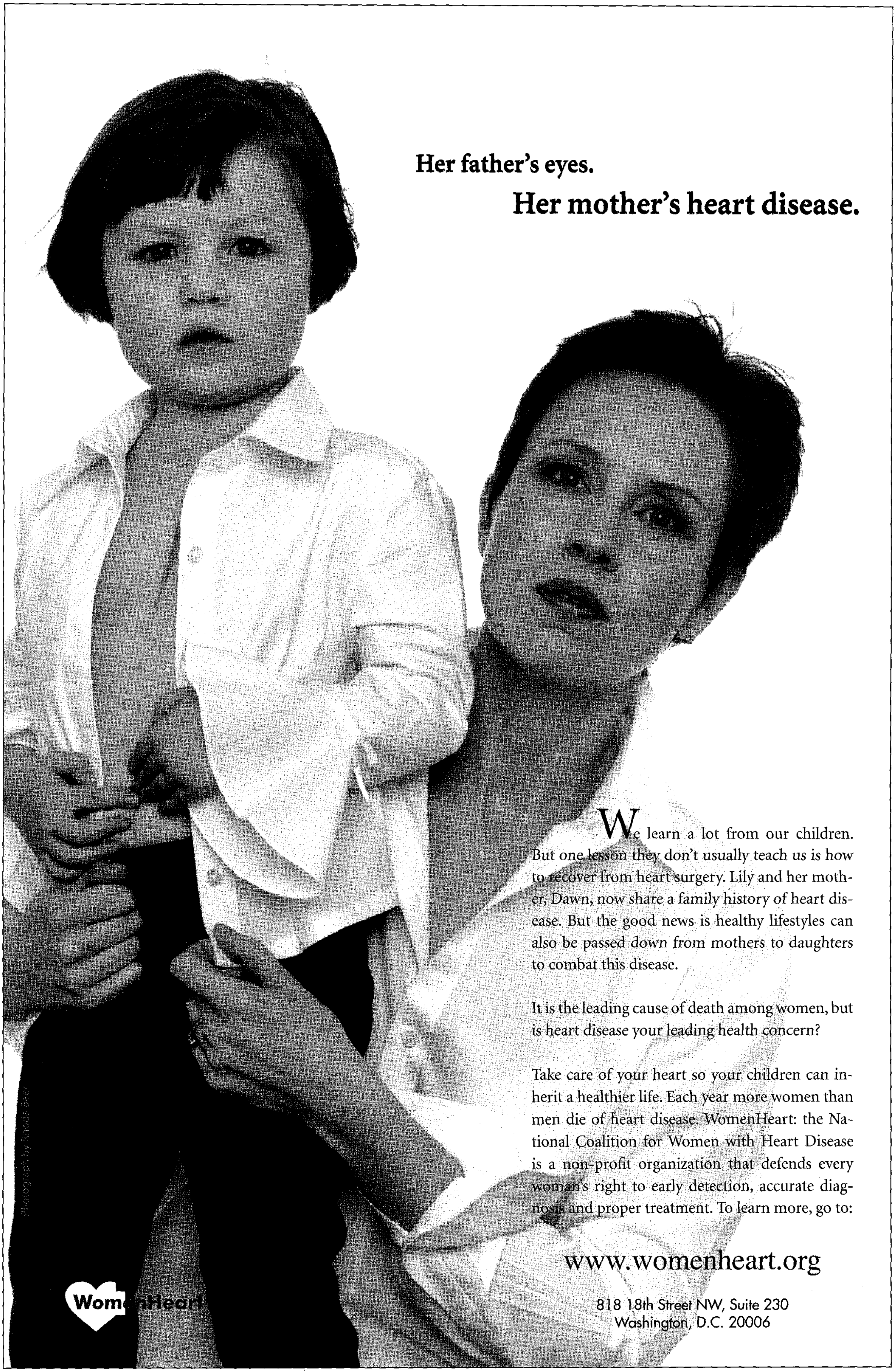

Her father's eyes.
Her mother's heart disease.

We learn a lot from our children. But one lesson they don't usually teach us is how to recover from heart surgery. Lily and her mother, Dawn, now share a family history of heart disease. But the good news is healthy lifestyles can also be passed down from mothers to daughters to combat this disease.

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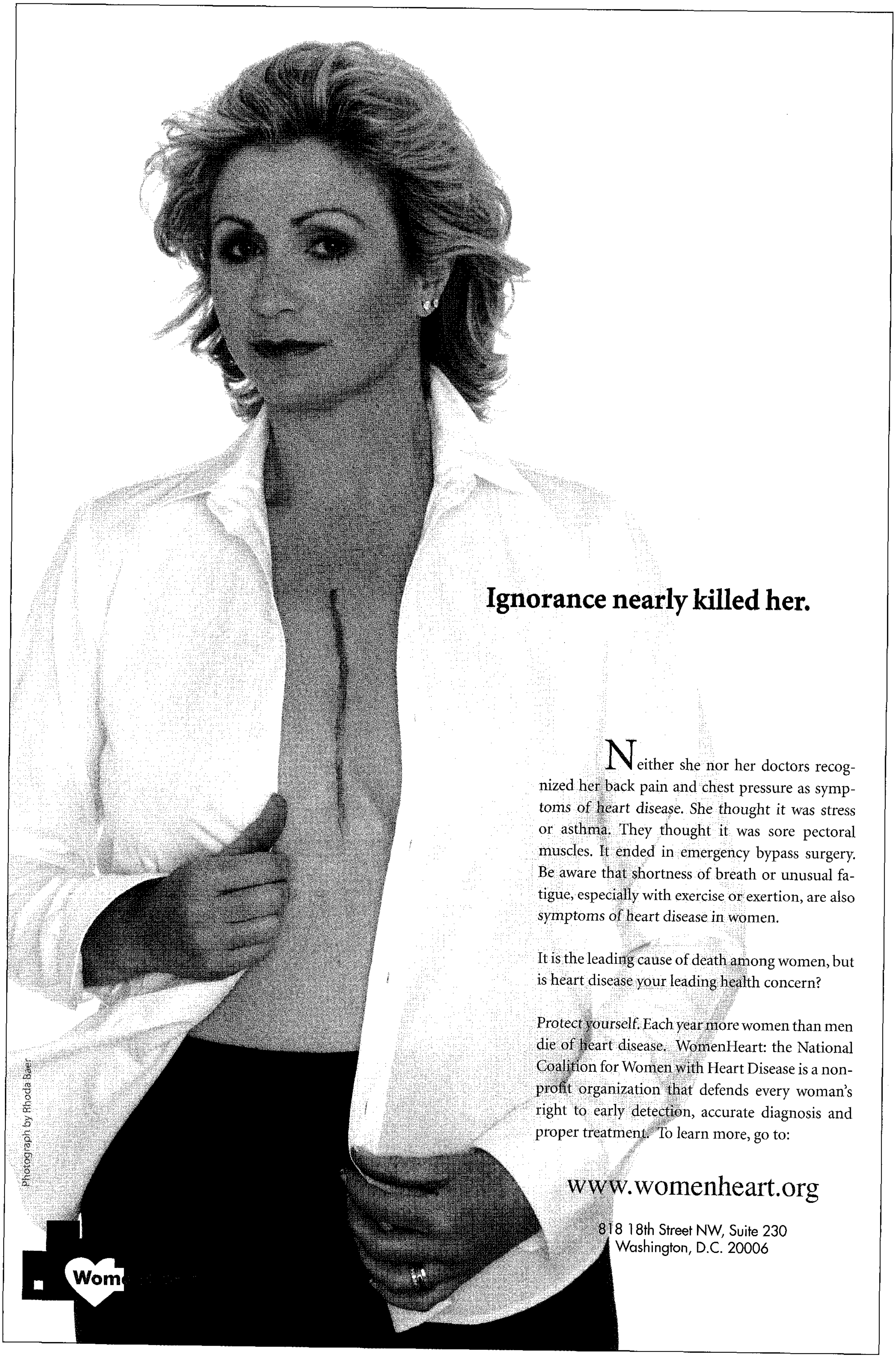

Ignorance nearly killed her.

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know every kind of fish that he can get his hands on. If I mention something he hasn't heard of before, he says, 'Send it.' He can get something new and taste it raw, and he knows exactly what to do with it. I'm about to send him a new fish from Brazil, pintado. It's also called a tigerfish. Amazing-looking. It makes you imagine that it could walk. It has no scales, and its skin is colored like a tiger's. It's never been imported to the United States before. It's a fish we found at a seafood exposition in Brussels. The minute I saw it, I thought of Dave."

Every weekday, Pasternack dispatches a buyer, Roberto Nuñez, and a driver ("Tony, the truck guy") to the Fulton Fish Market. About once a week, he shows up at the Fulton market for the pre-dawn rounds (a ritual that, lamentably, will soon be drained of its echt-Manhattan flavor, when the market relocates to Hunts Point, in the Bronx). Pasternack moves briskly from stall to stall, with an open mind and the confidence that if he doesn't see what he likes ("Some weeks the market's good, some weeks it has shit") he'll find something else somewhere else that will excite him. Certain dishes appear on the Esca menu three hundred and sixty-three days a year: Sicilian fish stew, Amalfitano fish soup, linguine with mahogany clams, spaghetti with a whole lobster, squid-ink pasta with cuttlefish, fritto misto, marinated anchovies and sardines, grilled octopus. But the guiding principle is that everything is provisional—dependent upon the quality of the available ingredients and upon Pasternack's sensibility ("There is no system; it's more about mood")—and that, of course, there are always plenty more fish in the sea.

Invariably, when I've dropped by Esca to see Pasternack, I've found him just inside the open doorway of the kitchen, on the ground-floor level, armed with a very sharp knife. The first fish I watched him perform surgery on was a forty-pound halibut that had recently been swimming in the vicinity of Portland. His workstation—situated to afford an unobstructed view of the line cooks and prep cooks at the grill, sauté, and pasta stations, and to allow him to inspect every dish before it leaves the kitchen—is two and a half feet deep and nine feet wide, sufficient to accommodate the occasional four-hundred-pound tuna. His knife was German, with a twelve-inch blade, one of a dozen of varying sizes that he keeps in a plastic tray within easy reach. "I sharpen my knives every Saturday," he said. "Nobody touches my knives. Not even my wife. They're sacred."

Downstairs, the halibut had already been scaled, gutted, and shorn of its dorsal and pelvic fins. It took Pasternack about a minute to remove the first fillet, drawing the knife handle toward him in sure, even strokes, with his left hand, as he proceeded along the spine. He lifted and flipped the fish, reinserted the knife laterally, just behind the pectoral fin, cut to the caudal fin, and severed the second fillet. He separated the flesh from the skin of both fillets as cleanly and economically as if he were peeling apples. The carcass was headed for the soup kettle, but not quite yet. "The head's gonna be my lunch," he said as he harvested two plum-sized lumps of cheek meat. Then he began trimming the fillets. "Pretty nice halibut," he said. "This time of year they can be on the spawn. The meat can be a little milky." Not in this instance, however. From each fillet he cut out the bloodline, a dark-meat layer that extends lengthwise below the dorsal fin, and sectioned the collar into strips for fritto misto. "You know, this is a fish that you're paying six and a half dollars a pound for. You're gonna lose at least thirty-five or forty per cent. So you've got to utilize the whole animal. That's where your knife really makes all the difference." The halibut's primary destiny was to be carved into seven-ounce serving portions, poached, and accompanied by smashed fava beans from Pennsylvania and a vinaigrette made with ramps from upstate New York. Twenty-seven dollars, à la carte.

Esca has seating for sixty—a hundred and ten in pleasant weather, when an outdoor patio is opened—and on a normal day each table fills four times. Pasternack fillets and slices fish throughout the morning and during lunch, breaks for a couple of hours in mid-afternoon, and then resumes until seven o'clock. He multitasks in a self-assured manner—announces orders to the line cooks; talks on the phone; consults with the front-of-the-house managers, nodding when he hears that there's someone in the dining room whom he should meet and greet; gives instructions to the kitchen runners, who shuttle one aluminum tray after another laden with freshly gutted fish—all the while wielding knives with the same rhythmic, delicate precision. How often does he cut himself? "Only when somebody asks me that question. No, actually, not that much. But I'm due." A wall phone with an extra-long cord rings at all hours, and Pasternack usually answers it himself, always with the same greeting: "Kitchen."

Between the moment he first looks at a fish and the moment he finishes filleting it, he often changes his mind about what he's going to do with it. If it's perfectly fresh yet doesn't look perfect (it hasn't been bled properly; it's bruised; it was caught in a net and drowned and the flesh is now too opaque; spawning season is under way and the texture seems a bit flabby or "funky"), it won't be right for the house specialty, crudo—sashimi-sized slices of raw fish that have been accented with sea salt, olive oil, and lemon juice, or with other condiments. But it would still be fine grilled or pan-seared or sautéed. I once asked him to try to articulate the process of creating a new dish. What, precisely, is he thinking when he combines raw fluke with sea beans, radish, and salt? Geoduck (a.k.a. giant clam crudo) with sugar-baby watermelon or artichoke? "I don't know, man," he replied. "It's a very hard question to answer. I think it's more experience than anything else. Experience dictates that you understand certain things about certain ingredients at certain times of year. You look in the fridge and you have to be able to work with what you have, in season. But it can't be arbitrary. That's the problem with a lot of these young cooks. They don't yet get the idea of how flavors can work, how you have to take into consideration acidity, texture, the properties of various oils. They think they're being creative but they're pushing the envelope too much. People like Daniel Boulud and Thomas Keller, what makes them so good is that their food is creative but they know the boundaries."

I suppose it's odd to say that I've

been struck by Pasternack's empathy for fish, given his recurring role in their demise, but he nevertheless seems intent upon doing honor to the deceased, characteristically by doing no more than necessary to evoke essential flavors and unembellished subtleties. Not that he's unwilling to call a fish a fish. One day, as I watched him reduce an eight-pound mahi-mahi to about thirty bites of crudo, he showed me its pearly, iridescent pale-pink flesh and said, "You don't always see it this color. Sometimes the meat's a little grayer." On the other hand, mahi-mahi is "a very stupid fish. You catch one and you leave him in the water and all the others'll follow and you can catch 'em all. Not very smart. Good eating, though."

Next, he went to work on a Pacific sturgeon, scraping away a yellow adipose layer that looked like chicken fat. "Atlantic sturgeon is a protected species," he said. "This fish was caught in the Columbia River, in Washington. It's called a bullet because of the shape. Actually, they're always a little dirty. But this is one of my personal favorites. Really fatty, like eating a piece of pork."

From time to time, I would prompt him with fish names and he would respond with an off-the-cuff Pasternackian taxonomy.

Flounder: "The quintessential Long Island fish. In New England, they've got scrod. Maine, they've got haddock. Long Island, it's flounder. I was born to flounder fish. I fished for them in Jamaica Bay, South Bay, Hewlett Harbor, under the Meadowbrook Bridge, Island Park, East Rockaway. It was a really abundant fish. But the flounder haven't coöperated in the last couple of years."

Cod: "Cod is God. The Spaniards came here in search of cod. Italians, the same thing. It's a great, versatile fish. Unfortunately, none of them seem to make that right turn at Montauk anymore."

Porgy: "Ghetto fish. It's a fish that's usually associated with minorities. A great fish. But not considered your mainstream white-bread fish. I grill it. Sweet meat. Phenomenal skin."

Hake: "In the cod family but sweeter, softer in texture than cod, not as rich; half the price of cod. I like it roasted, because it can get really caramelized on the outside without doing anything. It's just got a lot of natural sugars."

Bluefish: "Godzilla. The other quintessential Long Island fish. Pound for pound, the hardest-fighting fish there is. Ferocious, eats anything, bites anything that gets in its way. Powerful, elusive. You could stick a beer can on a hook with bait inside and the fish'll bite the beer can."

Pasternack's first restaurant job was more turf than surf. At fourteen, he bused tables in a Rockville Centre steak house whose charms included the bookies who hung out at the bar and the pictures of photo finishes that hung on the walls. Not until his mid-twenties, while cooking at La Reserve, an old-school French place near Rockefeller Center, did he commit to the notion that this was what he would do with his life. By then, he'd gone to college for a year; spent a winter cooking in Vermont and a couple of years at Provence, in Greenwich Village; earned a diploma from Johnson & Wales; and worked in a hotel kitchen in Dallas long enough (less than a week) to recognize that he belonged back in New York. He left La Reserve after three years, following the death of André Gaillard, the French-Vietnamese chef who had hired him, and for the next five years stayed in motion as a line cook or sous-chef in a number of busy, trendy restaurants: Bouley, Steak Frites, Prix Fixe, and Sam's (where he met Donna Peltz, who was tending bar). He was in his early thirties and feeling that he was spinning his wheels when Terrance Brennan, a former sous-chef at Le Cirque who had also been at Prix Fixe, asked him to come to Picholine, a year-old bistro near Lincoln Center. Brennan had a clear idea of what he wanted Picholine to be and the good sense to give Pasternack plenty of latitude. When Ruth Reichl, in a 1996 review in the *Times*, awarded the restaurant three stars, it was understood that Pasternack, the chef de cuisine, deserved much of the credit. One of his signature dishes was seared sturgeon with caviar sauce; the fish was served with a reduction of shallots, white wine, champagne vinegar, tarragon, and peppercorns whisked with a beurre blanc, to which malossol caviar was added at the last moment. Typical of Pasternack's cooking style at Picholine, it was labor-intensive (that is, French) in a way that his style at Esca is decidedly not.

While at Prix Fixe, he'd become friendly with Susan Cahn, whose family owned Coach Farms, and who often worked at their goat-cheese stand in the Union Square farmers' market. Through her, he met her husband-to-be, Mario Batali, who was then merely a robustly talented chef, not yet a food-culture demigod and conglomerateur. Batali and his partner Joe Bastianich, who between them had interests in five Manhattan restaurants (this was 1999; they're now up to ten), dined frequently at Picholine. They could see that Pasternack was crazy about fish yet otherwise demonstrably sane, and, conveniently, they had an available location, Fricco Bar, an underperforming trattoria on Forty-third Street west of Ninth Avenue.

"Joe and Mario kept coming into Picholine and saying, 'Come on, let's do something,'" Pasternack recalled. "They asked me what I wanted to do. I said a seafood restaurant, Provençal style. I wanted to call it Rascasse. That's the name of a very important fish in the whole Mediterranean culture. Bony, spiny, gnarly, a basic ingredient in bouillabaisse, *zuppa di pesce*, fritto misto. Joe said, 'Can you make it Italian?' I said, 'A good cook is a good cook. I can do it Chinese if you need to.' He said, 'Let's make a deal.'"

That fall, Pasternack accompanied Batali and Bastianich on a ten-day excursion to Italy. Starting out in Venice, they ate and drank their way up the Adriatic coast, toward Trieste and Istria, in northern Croatia. (On a subsequent trip, Batali and Pasternack and Simon Dean, who became a manager of and partner in Esca, spent a week in Amalfi, Sorrento, and Naples.) "We met my buddies who were fishmongers and restaurateurs," Bastianich, who owns vineyards in Friuli and Tuscany and is the co-author of a book on Italian regional wines, told me. "We found out that everyone was eating raw fish. We had thought we were going to come back with ideas along the lines of what you would consider classic Venetian-style food—risottos and *brodetto di pesce*. Crudo was a revelation."

They tasted, among other things, raw scampi, orata, branzino, lobster, scallops, and sole—briny, sweet, chewy, buttery, and enhanced only by lemon, olive oil, and sea salt. Immediately, they knew that the Esca kitchen would become a testing laboratory for crudo—a term that Bastianich more or less coined. (The word *crudo* means "uncooked," but when it appears on a menu in Italy it typically refers to prosciutto.)

"Joe conceptualized the idea behind our crudo selections," Batali told me. "And Dave's taken the ball and run around the bases several times with it. A month before we opened, we were in the kitchen, trying this and that. Dave did a crudo that was a giant sea scallop with tangerine oil, pink peppercorns, and some Sicilian sea salt. And it was a giant moment. It was: Holy shit, this is gonna be a great restaurant."

This is, perhaps, benignly revisionist history. According to Pasternack, none of them had quite foreseen that crudo would become the hallmark of Esca, or anticipated that the restaurant would generate such instant enthusiasm. "The crudo appetizers at Esca are the freshest, most exciting thing to happen to Italian food in recent memory," William Grimes wrote in the *Times*. Nor could Pasternack have predicted that his handiwork would inspire so much mimicry. "Imitated by many, copied by few," he likes to say about the post-Esca proliferation of crudo, which has become appetizer fare in such unlikely locales as Cleveland, Denver, and St. Louis.

Each day, Esca offers a dozen or so wallet-lightening crudo options. Thirty dollars, for instance, will bankroll a tasting selection that amounts to two bites each of, say, pink snapper with black lava sea salt, weakfish with a thin sliver of preserved blood-orange rind, opah with baby fennel and wild-fennel pollen, yellowtail with Gaeta-olive aioli, kingfish with pickled fiddlehead, and fluke with sea beans and radish. "Raw fish makes a statement about quality," Pasternack told me. "People don't eat raw fish at just any restaurant." And he draws a firm distinction between crudo and ordinary American sushi and sashimi. "I always liked sushi—and I lived above a sushi place for four years—but I thought it always tasted the same. Place A was the same as Place B as Place C."

One night last spring, I observed Pasternack adroitly handling a crudo crisis that materialized as he was preparing a guest-chef banquet at the James Beard House, in Greenwich Village. (In 2004, the James Beard Foundation honored him as the New York chef of the year.) Pasternack and his crew had come expecting to serve dinner to seventy-two, but, at the last minute, the Beard House staff had allowed an extra table of eight. Not counting the oysters that were served before everyone was seated, the menu included two crudo courses. The first of these consisted of two morsels of black sea bass garnished with lemon juice, sea

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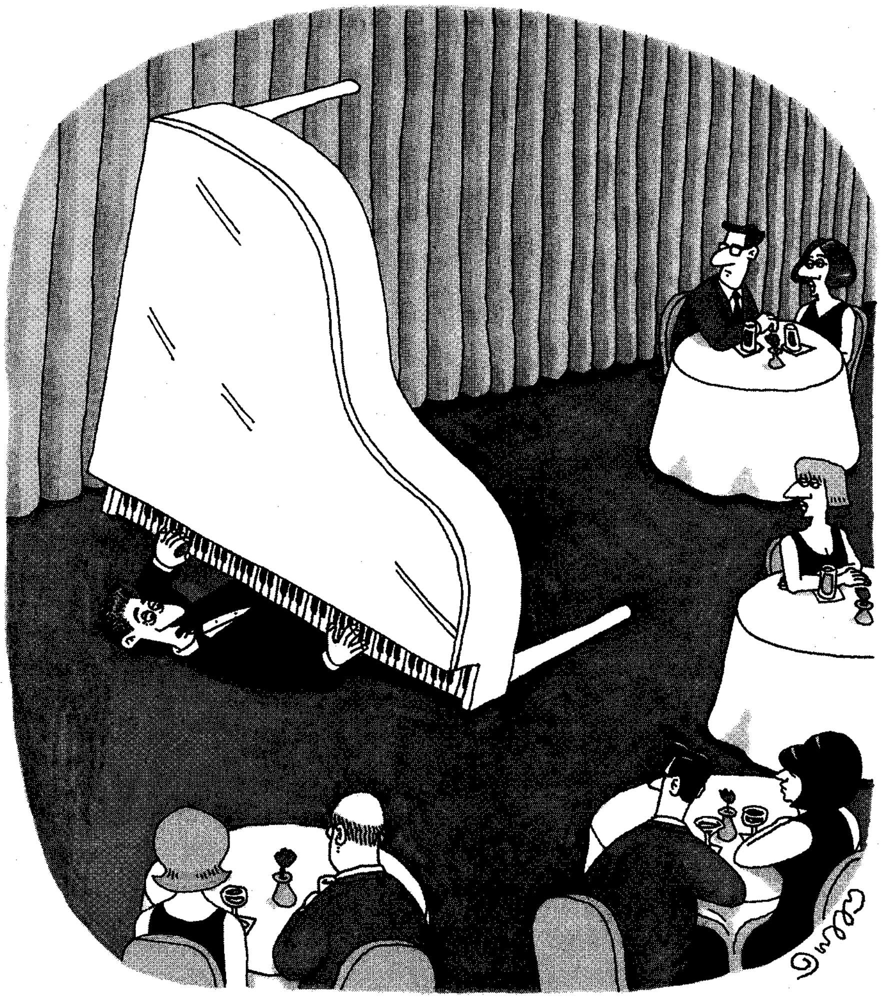

"This next song's about pain."

salt, pepper, and a sprig of salad burnet, a green that looks like parsley and tastes like cucumber. The bass had been cut by Pasternack that morning, and now eighty plates were lined up in the kitchen—eight of them empty. A loaves-and-fishes moment, of sorts. Somehow he discerned sixteen pieces of bass that could be halved, a sleight-of-knife executed so that no one in the dining room would notice. As he drizzled olive oil over each portion, he said, "How was that for creative management?" A faint smile. "They'll go home. They just won't necessarily go home full."

"For a lot of American chefs, it's hard to understand how simple things are in Italy," Batali said. "That was our idea, both with the crudo and with how Esca presents fish in general. It's all in the ingredients. When Dave talks about the difference between the fluke in Sheepshead Bay and the fluke from some other part of Long Island, you know that in fact one does taste different from the other. Dave has a real understanding of what the Italians call *materia prima*—the raw ingredients—and making them available for the palate to explore."

It hasn't proved to be a professional or interpersonal liability that Pasternack's instinctive Italian sensibility doesn't extend to actually speaking the language (though he possesses a sizable vocabulary of kitchen nouns and adjectives). One of the waitresses at the Beard House addressed him in Italian throughout the evening; he would occasionally nod, and nothing was apparently lost in translation. In the area of Long Island where he grew up there is a great deal of cultural overlap between Italian-Americans and Jews. For whatever reason—and probably not merely because in the twenty-eight years since his bar mitzvah he has consumed immeasurable quantities of pork and shellfish—his diction, body language, and general affinities make him come across like a bit player in "GoodFellas," so much so that he's occasionally prone to identity confusion. A few years ago, for an appearance with Bryant Gumbel on "The Early Show," he prepared a crudo that consisted of ivory salmon, fresh soybeans, lemon juice, sea salt, and olive oil. Gumbel asked, "How important is it what kind of oil you use on these fish?"

"Oil is essential," Pasternack replied. "When we talk about oil, we talk only about extra-virgin olive oil. Because it's like the Japanese put the soy sauce, us Italians, we put the olive oil."

When he got home, his father, who had been watching, called and said, "What's with this 'us Italians' business? We're Jewish. Remember?"

"My wife's half Italian," Dave replied.

"Davey," Mel Pasternack felt constrained to point out, "you don't inherit that."

A spring weekday, shortly after noon. In the Esca dining room—pale-yellow walls; brown leather banquettes; brass Art Deco sconces; a floor-to-ceiling expanse of Italian wines along one wall; a cherry-blossom arrangement that would shame a Christmas tree; otherwise, no dazzle and pleasantly little noise—orders are discreetly punched into a computer. Moments later, they emerge from a small printer on the kitchen counter where Pasternack works his way through a pile of striped bass while orchestrating the lunch flow. "Four times," he informs Pablo Martínez, at the garde-manger station—meaning that a party of four have placed their orders and are now ready for their *amuse-gueules,* a plate of grilled bruschetta topped with a mélange of cannelloni beans, smoked mackerel, olive oil, red onions, and parsley. As the first-course dishes leave the kitchen, he glances at a clock, scrawls the time on the printout, and clips it to a shelf at eye level. At the appropriate moment, he will cue his crew—Sarah Ochs, the sous-chef; Katie O'Donnell, the sauté cook; Mike

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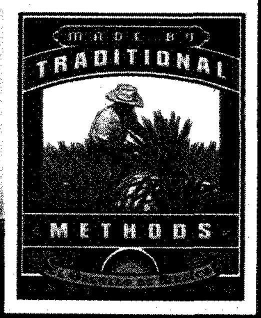
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Sneed, at the pasta station—to mobilize the entrées.

"Pablo, you got two asparagus, two caprese, and a mindora. You got a third caprese gonna go with the oysters and you got a fourth caprese gonna go with another asparagus.... Give me a chicken, got an octo, I got skate with a cod. I got a snapper with an octo, I got branzino.... We got two stripers, a cod, a snapper, an orata, and a fett"—fettuccine. "I got two times.... Two, two. Misto, order branzino, order snapper, a cod, make sure you got a branzino ahead of a cod, you got a cod, two stripers, snapper, and then an orata.... Double octo, and make 'em look soigné, Sarah. Put up a cod in a minute. You got another big branzino, you got a pimente. Mike, order two fetts.... All right, Pablo, you're gonna give me two asparagus, two caprese, and a spigola. Katie, you got asparagus and a caprese. Mike, you got the fett, it goes with the caprese.... Two two three three two.... Order three stripers and a porgy, another asparagus with arugula, another asparagus with a mista.... All right, Mike, spaghetti pimente. You got another spaghetti following the second branzino. You got a spaghetti with an orata. You got a spigola, snapper, skate, and an orata...."

The temperature literally rises, but the atmosphere remains coolly businesslike. When Simon Dean, the Esca manager, wanders in holding an envelope and a magazine and says, "Dave, here's a piece of what looks like hate mail. Also, here's your copy of the latest issue of *Private Air Magazine: Life at the Speed of Luxury*," Pasternack replies, "It's a little hard right now to be funny. I'd love to, but..." In fact, his mood is sanguine. A very nice piece of fish arrived that morning, a crimson shoulder cut from a seven-hundred-pound bluefin tuna—by way of Rod Mitchell, in Portland. "There's a lot of competition for these fish," he says. "I don't want to say I'm at the bottom of the pecking order. But I'm near the bottom. Plenty of people will pay a lot more than I will." At eighteen dollars a pound, the bluefin is too expensive to grill or sauté, so half of it will become crudo. The other half will go to Bistro du Vent, a calculatedly jointlike joint just around the corner, on Forty-second Street, that Pasternack and his Esca partners opened last January. There it will also be served raw, an appetizer à la steak tartare.

Four crudo plates are ready to be dispatched, but Pasternack first squirts a piece of bluefin with lemon juice, sprinkles it with pepper, sea salt, and olive oil, hands it to me, and declares, "This is the king of tuna, man. Think steak, filet mignon. This is what the Japanese'll pay exuberant prices for."

As it happens, he's just returned from Japan himself—his first visit, the highlight of which was a daily perambulation through Tsukiji, Tokyo's wholesale fish market ("like walking inside an aquarium"). He'd made the trip as the guest of Hiromi Go, an Esca regular.

"Hiromi's a very popular Japanese singer," he says. "He's like Elvis Presley over there. He's getting ready to record, like, his sixtieth album. He's been coming here for years and I'm always saying to him, 'When are you taking me to Tokyo?' So his wife set it up. I cooked two dinners, one for twelve people and one for forty. The second was in a Shinto shrine. I ate quite a few things I'd never had before."

Such as?

"Whale. It's really only fresh in Scandinavia, Russia, and Japan. Very interesting. A tuna-y texture and a liver-y finish. You know, in Japan they raise horses in the style of Kobe beef—massage it, give it *sake*, beer, different grains and grasses, play music for it. So I did a crudo dish that was horse, whale, and fatty tuna all on the same plate. They all looked alike. The whale could have been the tuna and the tuna could have been the horse."

A waiter comes in with the news that a customer has requested cocktail sauce to accompany what might best be described as an order of the original crudo—a half-dozen Peconic Bay oysters. Having just seen Pasternack gracing tidbits of abalone, weakfish, and opah with, respectively, gaila melon, crushed almonds, and *olio verde*, I expect him to take offense. Instead, he reaches into a knee-level cooler and removes a mixture of horseradish, fresh chiles, lemons, ketchup, capers, and olive oil. "It's their money," he says. "Give 'em what they want, they'll come back."

So that includes tartar sauce with the fritto misto?

"No. They ask for that, which I think happens maybe twice a year, we tell 'em we don't have it." He shrugs. "What're they gonna do? Hey, we don't have it, we don't have it."

I once asked Joe Bastianich, who enjoys sport-fishing for tuna, about his experiences on the water with Pasternack, and he said, "Dave's fishing, that's a little too blue-collar for me." For his part, Pasternack, who seems constitutionally incapable of condescension, has said, "I don't understand freshwater fishing. That's too Zen for me, too proper. Saltwater fishing, you know, there's a lot more blood and guts." A few years ago, Pasternack was invited, along with some other New York chefs, to a culinary event in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. While there, he went fly-fishing on the Green River with Ed Artzt, a frequent Esca patron who was formerly the chief executive of Procter & Gamble. "It was my first time fly-fishing," Pasternack said. "I was good, I was a natural. I was the only guy who actually caught anything. I caught a cutthroat. After I took it off the hook, I went to open the cooler and everybody on the boat kind of looked at me like, What are you doing? I'm like, 'Dinner.' They go, 'No, everything here's catch-and-release.' I said, 'I spent the whole day to catch this one fish and we're gonna *throw it back*?' "

My recollection of my first fishing outing with Pasternack, though it took place fairly recently, is somewhat spotty. We were aboard a commercial boat called the Sorry Charlie, about three miles from Point Lookout, Long Island. As the tide was running out, a brisk wind was blowing in, which meant that conditions were, by my standards, insufficiently calm. I spent part of the morning in the cabin, seated atop a cooler, resting my head against a wall, wondering when the Dramamine was going to kick in, and smiling weakly when my shipmates periodically impugned my manhood. The captain, Mike Wasserman, struggled nobly to stay anchored over an old shipwreck that was a reliable gathering spot for black sea bass. He succeeded well enough for the group—five of us were fishing—to land about twenty-five keepers and store them in the live well. "The Rolls-Royce of fish," Pasternack, who caught the most, said.

"Steamed, fried, poached, baked, sautéed, grilled—I'll take a black sea bass any day over a piece of tuna." In the afternoon, we moved close to the shore and, using clams for bait, hauled in dozens of stripers that had been trailing a clam dredger as it repeatedly plowed a half-mile stretch parallel to Rockaway Beach. At the end of the trip, Pasternack bought everything in the live well and the coolers, plus Wasserman's catch from the previous day: a hundred or so bass, and three conger eels that were headed for the *zuppa di pesce.*

The next time I went to sea was a sultry July day, when Pasternack was in quest of bluefish with his friend, piscatorial mentor, and supplier Artie Hoernig, the captain of Smokey III, a thirty-one-foot Down East-type cabin cruiser that he docks in Island Park. We met at 7 A.M. in the parking lot of Artie's South Shore Fish Market, where we were joined by Pete Hession, a retired U.P.S. driver. Hoernig, who is in his late fifties, has a mahogany tan, a neatly trimmed silver beard, bloodshot blue eyes, and an inexhaustible supply of fish stories. The date, he announced, happened to be the eighteenth anniversary of one of his most gratifying adventures, the landing of a seven-hundred-and-eighty-two-pound mako shark. That same year, Pasternack, then in his mid-twenties, caught a three-hundred-pound bull shark near Key West. He had the head mounted, and it hung in his bedroom until a couple of years ago, when his wife told him, "Either the garage or you give it away." It now occupies wall space at Artie's market, right next to the head of the mako.

Hoernig went inside and returned with the day's bait, twenty pounds of fresh and thirty pounds of frozen bunker, two flats of frozen spearing that would be used as chum, and ten pounds of frozen squid. A half hour later, this cargo got loaded onto the boat, along with three large coolers filled with crushed ice, and by nine o'clock we'd reached our destination, an area five miles offshore where Hoernig had planted about forty-five lobster pots.

The ocean surface was oddly placid. Hoernig: "It's like a fucking lake."

Hession: "I hope we see a breeze."

Pasternack: "The only breeze we're gonna see out here, Pete, is thunderstorms."

Using bait-casting reels with forty-pound-test wire leaders and heavy-test monofilament backing, we tossed treble hooks baited with thick chunks of bunker into water about sixty feet deep. From the get-go, the bluefish were excitable. Pasternack quickly landed a seven-pounder, I caught one, Pasternack caught another. Then things got quiet for about fifteen minutes. "One, two, three, and that's it?" Hoernig said. "Probably a fucking mako's down there chasing these bastards."

When they resumed biting, Hoernig would say, "Davey's in!" or Hession would say, "Oh, Artie's in!" Then: "Pete's in!" Bluefish have notoriously sharp teeth and strong jaws, and the most pru-

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dent way to get one into a boat is with a gaff. As promised, there was ample gore—bluefish blood and bunker guts. At times, we had three fish on the line simultaneously. By eleven o'clock, we'd filled one cooler. A half hour later, Hoernig switched to an ultra-light spinning rod and tied on a bucktail jig baited with a piece of squid, rigged for what's referred to on the South Shore as "fluking." He soon landed a two-and-a-half-pounder, and Pasternack, in a competitive spirit, got busy fluking, too. Occasionally, someone would lower a white plastic bucket over the side and fill it with water for washing our bloody hands. As the midday sun poured down, Pasternack and Hoernig took to cupping handfuls and dousing their heads. "I'm getting fucking ready to jump in, man," Pasternack said. It was not yet one o'clock when the second cooler reached capacity—mostly blues, a few fluke, a sea bass. Time to go pull lobster pots.

Citing my journalistic priorities, I managed to steer clear of the heavy lifting. As Hoernig eased the boat alongside a buoy, Pasternack would use a gaff to grab the submerged rope, and Hession would wrap a couple of turns around a small electric winch attached to the starboard gunwale. Invariably, the ropes were coated with algae the consistency of sodden shredded wheat and the lobster traps were encrusted with tiny mussels the size of split peas. The first few pots contained little Jonah and calico crabs and conch, and porgies flapping like birds, but were lobster-free. "No wonder your lobster's so expensive," Pasternack said.

"A labor of love," he said to me as he tossed clumps of algae overboard and prepared to dump putrescent bunker carcasses from the mesh bait bag inside a trap. Pasternack wore a plain white T-shirt, loose-fitting gray athletic shorts, white crew socks, calf-length white rubber boots, and an F.D.N.Y. Rescue cap. Varieties of fish flesh were pasted to his clothing, but he didn't appear to mind, unlike Hession, who concluded that the best way to clean the filth from his bluejeans was to tie them to a fishing line and drag them behind the boat. Which seemed like a clever idea until the line snapped, stranding him in his green plaid boxers. ("All I can say, Pete, is you're a victim of circumstance," Hoernig told him.)

RANSOM

Death is not Prime Minister or resplendent,
not eternal darkness, silence, or heaven-sent.
Death is an unrepresentative form of government,
a dead mother and father who rule without consent,
a drone in every flower, the Queen in her hive.
They have a room in every house, pay no rent.
Silent at dinner, they deceive, connive,
as the clock ticks. They never say "Live and let live."

How many times have I tried to sing them to sleep?
Eternal bride and bridegroom,
I do what I do to make my death handsome,
to make them proud, to win a faceless smile by a leap-
ing somersault to childhood. I pay ransom
to my kidnappers, who tie me to their bed—to weep
in their pillow, to sleep, to dream, to do or undo,
to twinkle twinkle in their firmament of two.

Silly to think there was a death: a father and mother
before there was time. Perhaps there was a single egg,
like the egg that hatched love, or something profane, other,
an indebtedness to which we should not pray but beg
for more time. Or do we take a steel shovel and dig,
dig up a God, a Father who had a Holy Mother.
Perhaps love and death were married beneath a single egg,
a sign of resurrection like the butterfly.
Mothers and fathers live until their children die.

—*Stanley Moss*

Some squid eggs—transparent Gummi-worm-like masses—clung to one of the traps. I asked Pasternack whether he'd ever eaten them. He said that he hadn't, but that he'd tasted octopus eggs in Italy. Almost defensively, he added, "I ate bunker. I got Artie to eat it, too. Little ones. They fried 'em in his restaurant. We called 'em Hewlett Bay anchovies. The sardines of Long Island. It was good, right, Artie? People squirted lemon juice on 'em." He leaned over with the squid eggs, handed them to me, and said, "Here, put this in the cooler."

They hoisted twenty-two traps, good for twenty-one lobsters. As Pasternack relaunched traps by sliding them down a plank and off the rear of the boat, he whistled "I've Been Working on the Railroad."

"You like blue-fishing?" he asked me as we headed back.

Yes, I did.

He leaned against the gunwale. In the background: Atlantic Beach and the high-rises of the Rockaways. The sun was in his face, he was bloody and sweaty and due for a shave. Lunch had been a turkey-and-cheddar sub, and there were dabs of mayo at the corners of his mouth. "I told you, I don't always catch the biggest one, but I'm always catching 'em," he said. "Some guys are only about catching big fish. I've always been for quantity. I like to eat 'em. I'm a meat-and-potatoes guy."

I asked what he would do with the bluefish at Esca.

Palms up, he shook his head. "There's lots of good stuff to work with now," he said. "Lobster mushrooms. Great corn. Good tomatoes are starting to show up. This time of year it's easy to be a cook." Today, though, he'd been fishing and truly hadn't given it a thought. But tomorrow, back in the kitchen, he'd have an idea. ♦

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Important Safety Information: Be sure you have at least eight hours to devote to sleep before becoming active. Until you know how you'll react to Lunesta, you should not drive or operate machinery. Do not use alcohol while taking Lunesta. All sleep medicines carry some risk of dependency. Side effects may include unpleasant taste, headache, drowsiness and dizziness. *See important patient information on the next page.*

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1, 2 AND 3 MG TABLETS

Please read this summary of information about LUNESTA before you talk to your doctor or start using LUNESTA. It is not meant to take the place of your doctor's instructions. If you have any questions about LUNESTA tablets, be sure to ask your doctor or pharmacist.

LUNESTA is used to treat different types of sleep problems, such as difficulty in falling asleep, difficulty in maintaining sleep during the night, and waking up too early in the morning. Most people with insomnia have more than one of these problems. You should take LUNESTA immediately before going to bed because of the risk of falling.

LUNESTA belongs to a group of medicines known as "hypnotics" or, simply, sleep medicines. There are many different sleep medicines available to help people sleep better. Insomnia is often transient and intermittent. It usually requires treatment for only a short time, usually 7 to 10 days up to 2 weeks. If your insomnia does not improve after 7 to 10 days of treatment, see your doctor, because it may be a sign of an underlying condition. Some people have chronic sleep problems that may require more prolonged use of sleep medicine. However, you should not use these medicines for long periods without talking with your doctor about the risks and benefits of prolonged use.

Side Effects

All medicines have side effects. The most common side effects of sleep medicines are:

- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Difficulty with coordination

Sleep medicines can make you sleepy during the day. How drowsy you feel depends upon how your body reacts to the medicine, which sleep medicine you are taking, and how large a dose your doctor has prescribed. Daytime drowsiness is best avoided by taking the lowest dose possible that will still help you sleep at night. Your doctor will work with you to find the dose of LUNESTA that is best for you. Some people taking LUNESTA have reported next-day sleepiness.

To manage these side effects while you are taking this medicine:

- When you first start taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, until you know whether the medicine will still have some effect on you the next day, use extreme care while doing anything that requires complete alertness, such as driving a car, operating machinery, or piloting an aircraft.
- Do not drink alcohol when you are taking LUNESTA or any sleep medicine. Alcohol can increase the side effects of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine.
- Do not take any other medicines without asking your doctor first. This includes medicines you can buy *without a prescription. Some medicines can cause* drowsiness and are best avoided while taking LUNESTA.
- Always take the exact dose of LUNESTA prescribed by your doctor. Never change your dose without talking to your doctor first.

Special Concerns

There are some special problems that may occur while taking sleep medicines.

Memory Problems

Sleep medicines may cause a special type of memory loss or "amnesia." When this occurs, a person may not remember what has happened for several hours after taking the medicine. This is usually not a problem since most people fall asleep after taking the medicine. Memory loss can be a problem, however, when sleep medicines are taken while traveling, such as during an airplane flight and the person wakes up before the effect of the medicine is gone. This has been called "traveler's amnesia." Memory problems have been *reported rarely by patients taking LUNESTA in clinical* studies. In most cases, memory problems can be avoided if you take LUNESTA only when you are able to get a full night of sleep before you need to be active again. Be sure to talk to your doctor if you think you are having memory problems.

Tolerance

When sleep medicines are used every night for more than a few weeks, they may lose their effectiveness in helping you sleep. This is known as "tolerance." Development of tolerance to LUNESTA was not observed in a clinical study of 6 months' duration. Insomnia is often transient and intermittent, and prolonged use of sleep medicines is generally not necessary. Some people, though, have chronic sleep problems that may require more prolonged use of sleep medicine. If your sleep problems continue, consult your doctor, who will determine whether other measures are needed to overcome your sleep problems.

Dependence

Sleep medicines can cause dependence in some people, especially when these medicines are used regularly for longer than a few weeks or at high doses. Dependence is the need to continue taking a medicine because stopping it is unpleasant.

When people develop dependence, stopping the medicine suddenly may cause unpleasant symptoms (see *Withdrawal* below). They may find they have to keep taking the medicine either at the prescribed dose or at increasing doses just to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

All people taking sleep medicines have some risk of becoming dependent on the medicine. However, people who have been dependent on alcohol or other drugs in the past may have a higher chance of becoming addicted to sleep medicines. This possibility must be considered before using these medicines for more than a few weeks. If you have been addicted to alcohol or drugs in the past, it is important to tell your doctor before starting LUNESTA or any sleep medicine.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal symptoms may occur when sleep medicines are stopped suddenly after being used daily for a long time. In some cases, these symptoms can occur even if the medicine has been used for only a week or two. In mild cases, withdrawal symptoms may include unpleasant feelings. In more severe cases, abdominal and muscle cramps, vomiting, sweating, shakiness, and, rarely, seizures may occur. These more severe withdrawal symptoms are very uncommon. Although withdrawal symptoms have not been observed in the relatively limited controlled trials experience with LUNESTA, there is, nevertheless, the risk of such events in association with the use of any sleep medicine.

Another problem that may occur when sleep medicines are stopped is known as "rebound insomnia." This means that a person may have more trouble sleeping the first few nights after the medicine is stopped than before starting the medicine. If you should experience rebound insomnia, do not get discouraged. This problem usually goes away on its own after 1 or 2 nights.

If you have been taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine for more than 1 or 2 weeks, do not stop taking it on your own. Always follow your doctor's directions.

Changes In Behavior And Thinking

Some people using sleep medicines have experienced unusual changes in their thinking and/or behavior. These effects are not common. However, they have included:

- More outgoing or aggressive behavior than normal
- Confusion
- Strange behavior
- Agitation
- Hallucinations
- Worsening of depression
- Suicidal thoughts

How often these effects occur depends on several factors, such as a person's general health, the use of other medicines, and which sleep medicine is being used. Clinical experience with LUNESTA suggests that it is rarely associated with these behavior changes.

It is also important to realize it is rarely clear whether these behavior changes are caused by the medicine, are caused by an illness, or have occurred on their own. In fact, sleep problems *that do not improve may be due to illnesses that were present* before the medicine was used. If you or your family notice any changes in your behavior, or if you have any unusual or disturbing thoughts, call your doctor immediately.

Pregnancy And Breastfeeding

Sleep medicines may cause sedation or other potential effects in the unborn baby when used during the last weeks of pregnancy. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, if you are planning to become pregnant, or if you become pregnant while taking LUNESTA.

In addition, a very small amount of LUNESTA may be present in breast milk after use of the medication. The effects of very small amounts of LUNESTA on an infant are not known; therefore, as with all other prescription sleep medicines, it is recommended that you not take LUNESTA if you are breastfeeding a baby.

Safe Use Of Sleep Medicines

To ensure the safe and effective use of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, you should observe the following cautions:

1. LUNESTA is a prescription medicine and should be used ONLY as directed by your doctor. Follow your doctor's instructions about how to take, when to take, and how long to take LUNESTA.
2. *Never use LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine for longer than directed by your doctor.*
3. If you notice any unusual and/or disturbing thoughts or behavior during treatment with LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, contact your doctor.
4. Tell your doctor about any medicines you may be taking, including medicines you may buy without a prescription and herbal preparations. You should also tell your doctor if you drink alcohol. DO NOT use alcohol while taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine.
5. Do not take LUNESTA unless you are able to get 8 or more hours of sleep before you must be active again.
6. Do not increase the prescribed dose of LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine unless instructed by your doctor.
7. When you first start taking LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine, until you know whether the medicine will still have some effect on you the next day, use extreme care while doing anything that requires complete alertness, such as driving a car, operating machinery, or piloting an aircraft.
8. Be aware that you may have more sleeping problems the first night or two after stopping any sleep medicine.
9. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant, if you are planning to become pregnant, if you become pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding a baby while taking LUNESTA.
10. As with all prescription medicines, never share LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine with anyone else. Always store LUNESTA or any other sleep medicine in the original container and out of reach of children.
11. Be sure to tell your doctor if you suffer from depression.
12. LUNESTA works very quickly. You should only take LUNESTA immediately before going to bed.
13. For LUNESTA to work best, you should not take it with or immediately after a high-fat, heavy meal.
14. Some people, such as older adults (i.e., ages 65 and over) and people with liver disease, should start with the lower dose (1 mg) of LUNESTA. Your doctor may choose to start therapy at 2 mg. In general, adults under age 65 should be treated with 2 or 3 mg.
15. Each tablet is a single dose; do not crush or break the tablet.

Note: This summary provides important information about LUNESTA. If you would like more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist to let you read the Prescribing Information and then discuss it with him or her.

Rx only

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LETTER FROM LONDON AND PARIS

TWO COOKS

Taking food to the extremes.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

On an overcast, gray-to-white London summer morning, the British chef Fergus Henderson is standing and staring reverently at the edge of Smithfield, the great meat market in the East End. If it is still reasonably early by restaurant standards, it is late in the day by those of a wholesale market; though Smithfield, an arcaded nineteenth-century affair of bright-painted cast-iron arches and venders' stalls, is beginning to close for the day, it still hums with a sense of sociable business ritual. Wholesalers in straw hats pack up their bacon and chops and trotters, some in Cryovac, some in shiny brown butcher paper.

Henderson's relationship to Smithfield these days is largely spiritual—he gets most of the meat for his nearby restaurant, St. John, from private country suppliers and small boutique slaughterhouses—but it is still an enchanted place for him. "It's a bit of a closed society, with its own customs and traditions," he says. "And it represents a certain tradition that began before pink-in-plastic." ("Pink-in-plastic" is Henderson's dismissive name for supermarket meat.) "For centuries, using the whole beast was the common sense of the market. Embrace your carcass and you'll be richer and happier."

Fergus Henderson is a man in love with meat. He even looks like an English butcher. His face is florid, with the raspberry blush that one associates with the kind of all-right-then-dearie butcher who might appear in a Boulting Brothers comedy of the fifties. Since he opened St. John, in 1995, he has become famous for his devotion to the odd bits of ordinary animals. Ox tongue and tripe, lambs' brains and pigs' heads, stuffed lambs' hearts and rolled pigs' spleen: St. John has returned them to the repertory of the world's "high" cooking, while Henderson's book "Nose to Tail Eating"—which for a long time had to be bought in the United States on a gray market of second-hand copies, where prices could sometimes reach a hundred dollars—has become the "Ulysses" of the whole food–Slow Food movement, a plea for the fullness of life that begins with a man eating innards. (It has at last been published in America, under the slightly cosmeticized name of "The Whole Beast.")

One restaurant savors the eating of innards. The other serves only garden vegetables.

HANS GISSINGER

Henderson starts walking the block and a half back to his restaurant. "The *squirrels*, I suppose," he says, after a moment's pause. He has been asked if any particular adventures in heterodoxy caused comment in London. "Squirrel is delicious—like an oily wild rabbit. We had some that had been trapped by keepers in the country, and I decided to do a whole plate of them. Re-create the forest floor: wilted greens, to suggest the bosky woods they come from. Rather poetic, the whole thing. But somehow serving squirrels created quite a stir."

St. John, a converted nineteenth-century smokehouse, has two rooms: a twenty-foot-high sky-lit, cathedral-ceilinged front room, where the bar and bakery are, and the dining room, just beyond. The dining room is large and whitewashed; a row of knobs and hooks for coats goes around the room, giving it the air of an eighteenth-century eating house or tavern, though the open space is unlike any actual eighteenth-century tavern—it's more Saatchi collection than Cheshire Cheese, a hint, perhaps, that archaism and modernism are in more complicated relation here than is evident at first glimpse, or smell. The kitchen seems to be visible from the dining room, but, as Henderson says, "It's a very tricky kind of openness. You can't actually see inside. It's the Mt. Fuji principle borrowed from Japanese prints. You should never see the whole

"I just wish you would try counting your blessings the way you do your carbs."

• •

of Mt. Fuji, you know." Henderson shows off the restaurant's tiny, cool larder. Inside a steel drawer, a suckling piglet lies waiting to be eaten, its feet curled up comfortably, its eyes closed, its face smiling. It has been specially ordered, and will be roasted and served later that week, nose to tail.

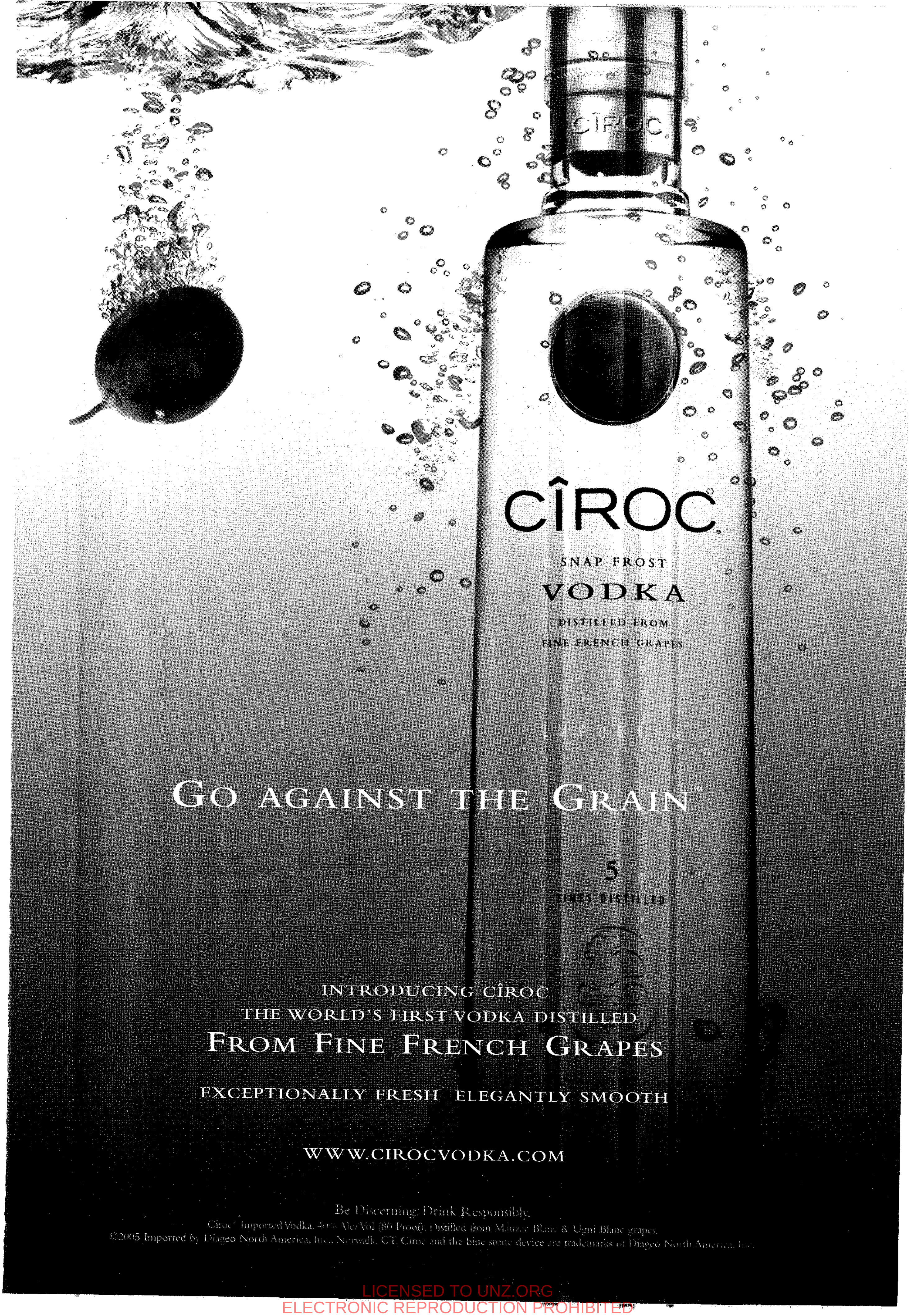
Over Hobbit-like elevenses (seed cake and Madeira), Henderson begins to talk about the ascent that has turned him, at forty-two, into a public figure widely viewed in his homeland as a cross between Jamie Oliver and Sweeney Todd—an image that he sustains with a complex and comic irony. "Isn't the approach to lunch the most wonderful time of day?" he asks. "Lunch is a choice, a decision of a sort. At dinner one must eat, but at lunch one chooses to eat well. There's a certain excitement in lunch."

An assistant brings him the day's menu, and he looks it over. Though he no longer works in the kitchen, he still oversees each day's choices. Today's menu, written a little defiantly in nothing but English (only "crème fraîche," an adopted phrase, breaks the Anglo-Saxon attitude), is a calm, squirrel-less document: there is to be Middlewhite—a kind of northern pig—and also deep-fried tripe, veal-tail broth, devilled kidneys, and ox heart with beetroot and pickled walnut. The desserts are English, too, or Englishy, Eccles cake and Lancashire cheese, and even something called Eton Mess, which some people have suggested is not food at all but a succinct explanation of the sex lives of many British politicians.

In spite of his matey, Ealing Studios manner, Henderson is actually a former architect, with almost no formal training as a chef. "My mum was a good cook and my dad was a big eater," he recalls, "and both of them were architects"—well-known second-generation modernists, in fact. "I trained as an architect, but I found lunch in architectural offices discouraging. People ate at their desks. Then, with a friend, I began doing big peasant dishes over in a restaurant in Covent Garden when it was closed. We did cassoulet or pot-au-feu and would have forty or fifty people come and sit at a common table. That led to my finding work as a chef, even though I didn't have the training. I became the cook in a couple of places—I was lucky not to have to work for other people—and then I met my business partners. We found this place, and I began cooking here. We opened, got warm reviews, and, very quickly, turned the corner. I don't know what that corner was, but we turned it." (Henderson opened St. John at the height of the B.S.E. scare, which makes him modify his menu slightly; to this day, lambs' brains are out.)

Henderson had always liked innards, but it was only as he began to cook that he came to recognize the absurdity of our usual meat eating, which clings to a few square feet of animal muscle near the skeleton, as timorous natives might cling to a few square feet of coast on an island while avoiding the volcanic mountains inland. "There were all these wonderful, splendid bits of the animal being wasted, thrown out, while we were eating nothing but the filet," he said, pronouncing "filet" in the English manner, with a hard last consonant. "It seemed positively insulting to the animal that one had raised to treat it with such contempt. So many wonders there. Spleen! Spleen is a very fine, perfectly framed organ. In fact, your spleen swells when you're in love! How can you resist an organ that does that?"

He believes not only that animals should be made happy by being raised well, slaughtered humanely, and eaten entirely but that you can taste the emotional state of the animal on your plate. He senses this with hares. "Rabbits, when they're wild, have a very different temperament, which is expressed in their muscles. Welsh rabbits used to have a certain . . . tension. You could *taste* their tension. Now we've been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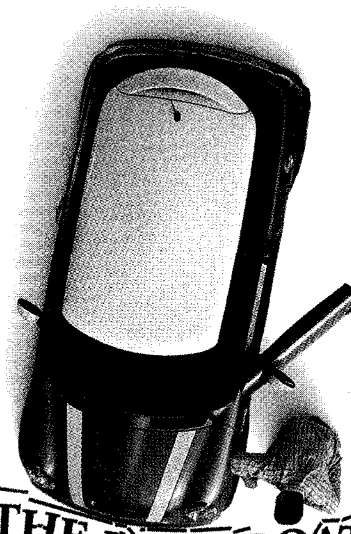

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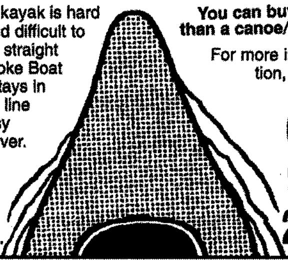

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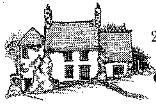


using more relaxed Yorkshire rabbits, which are splendid in their way, but not as tense and interesting as the Welsh rabbits."

Henderson's devotion to the bits of the animal that other people tend to throw away or make faces at is partly a revivalist aesthetic, a tribute to peasant traditions, but it is closer to certain weird outer ends of conceptual installation than to anything nostalgic. The more time one spends with him, the more inclined one is to think that certain of his American devotees can miss an edge of irony and po-faced British wit in his approach. This is not to say that he doesn't think that tails and heads and spleens are good to eat—he does think that, absolutely—but he also thinks that the *idea* that noses and tails and feet and spleens might be good to eat would be interesting even if they weren't as good to eat as they are. He grasps that even sincere gestures in the kitchen become social symbols on the plate—that the idea of eating rolled spleen and pig's tail has resonances and challenges apart from the taste of rolled spleen and pig's tail in the mouth. He is, as an ironist, close to Damien Hirst, an inventor who plays on the line between display and disgust, and yet Henderson steps soberly over that line to the constant edge of delight.

His attitude to the Englishness of his food is complex. Despite that menu written almost entirely in English, and English English, at that—no ricotta ravioli, no noisettes—the wine list is exclusively French. ("Of course, there's the Aquitaine connection," he says.) Yet when pressed for his influences he cites Marcella Hazan, and his favorite experience of eating is the walk in Paris through the Palais Royal toward the Grand Véfour on a sunny afternoon. The book that lurks behind his approach is Elisabeth Luard's "Sacred Food," an eccentric polemic for a kind of universal home cooking, a transformational grammar of whole beasts and comforting puddings, rooted in the conviction that a restoration of this kind of cooking, in each of its regional guises, is essential to the recovery of a whole civilization.

The most famous dish that Henderson has created is a study in the invention of English tradition through multicultural wit: a salad of bone marrow, parsley, and capers, which, though it seems today to be as rural and English as Eccles cake, occurred to him a decade ago after watching a French film, "La Grande Bouffe." "It has that scene where the man delights in marrow bones," he recalls. "And a friend had come in and all I had left were the marrow bones and the parsley and some capers. I thought that they would make a splendid marriage. I love the idea of food in which you participate. The singe is very important, getting the right singe on the bones. And the parsley. Vegetables these days are chopped into tiny grass. We *discipline* the parsley, so that it's chopped, yet still parsley. And capers are so important. They're the 'Nyeh!' factor in the dish." He makes a kind of complaining, whinnying noise. "You always need a little 'Nyeh!' on the plate. Pickled walnuts do the same thing for ox heart."

He sighs and looks over at the kitchen. "I wish I could stay in the kitchen through the service, but I'm not really trustworthy with this ropy left side of mine," he says. For the past few years, Henderson has been struggling with Parkinson's disease, which courses through his body like a lightning storm in summer, sending his left arm and hand into paroxysms of uncontrolled movement. He is neither melodramatic about it nor showily brave. "It was a bad day," he says of the moment he learned from his doctors about the disease. "My hand had been moving steadily to my chest, John Wayne in a Western movie, and I thought, How odd! And then it turned out to be this. I sat down and had a good lunch and felt somewhat better." His wife, Margot, and his three children, he says, have come to accept his "ropiness," and, later this year, he will have experimental surgery that will place electrodes in his brain to try to control it.

"Disgust is always rooted in a perception of asymmetry," he says suddenly. "Geometry cures it. Take the haggis, for instance. It's made of sheep's stomach and sheep's lights, but people will eat it because it's comfortably round. Sausages have always been allowed in, because of their shape. People are somehow reassured."

Disgust, the psychologist Paul Rozin has suggested, may be a kind of optimal strategy for solving what he calls the "omnivore's dilemma": animals that can eat everything have to be especially cautious about what parts of other animals they eat. The default assumption seems to be that all animals are disgusting, and we have to learn an item-by-item list of what's acceptable. In this way, we enclose our children in our own double wrapping, composed of both common sense and collective neurosis. Yet it is also obviously true that the mind overgeneralizes its fear of the unshaped, and knows it. So along with the "Don't eat it!" impulse comes a "Dare you to eat it!" impulse, and it is between these two impulses that Henderson dances.

By now, lunch has progressed through many meats, with various quick detours into the vegetable world—St. John serves leaves, and even excels at them—and there is the promise of an unequalled dark-chocolate ice cream ahead. Henderson finishes off his ox heart with pickled walnuts. "The heart is the most expressive muscle in any animal," he says as he cleans his plate. "It's amazing, a muscle that works so endlessly and tirelessly to keep us alive. And yet it emerges tender and distinctive. Each animal heart is resonant with its animal. Ox heart has an honest beefy quality, lamb's heart rubs up against you. Each heart tastes like the animal that depended on it."

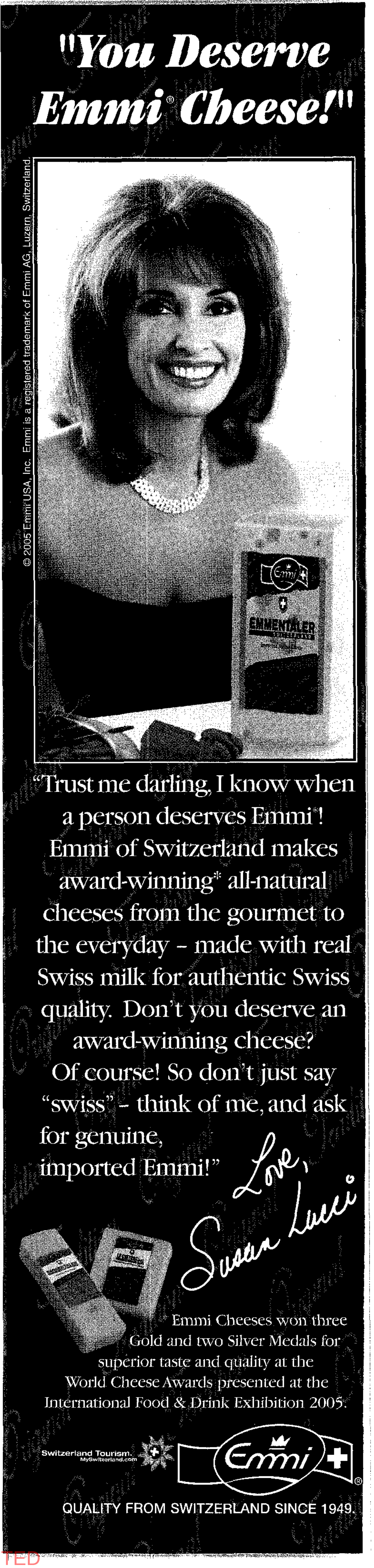
In Henderson's own heart there is, one senses, a harmony between man and his food that comes from eating all of the animal there is to eat, a mysticism rooted in fatality and the fact of our being, head to toe, animals, too. We are all meat, trembling and fresh, dying and spasming, and we enter into our humanity, as we leave it, by way of our animalness. We are beasts eating beasts, and the real bestiality, he suggests, lies in avoiding the truth of it. "Taste that!" he says, pressing a bit of fatty Middlewhite on his neighbor. "It comes from a happy pig. You can taste the difference. People eat meat. You can be an unhappy carnivore, and eat pink-in-plastic, or a wise carnivore and eat the animal with care and respect. To eat the whole beast is to accept existence. Embrace your carcass! It's simply common sense."

H-T D-GS
DRY CLEANER

On a hot, white-and-gold French summer afternoon, Alain Passard is standing in his kitchen garden on the grounds of the Château du Gros Chesnay, in Fillé-sur-Sarthe, about two hundred kilometres southwest of Paris, near the racing town of Le Mans. A few years ago, Passard, the owner and chef of the restaurant L'Arpège, on the Rue de Varenne, in Paris, which since 1996 has had three stars in the Michelin Red Guide, bought the château in order to create a *potager*, an organic vegetable garden. He bought it through a uniquely French practice, in which a younger person buys the property of an older one while the old person is still alive. This gives the older person a cash infusion, and the new buyer gets at least a little use of the property while he or she waits to get it all. The practice can create a situation as intensely delicate as a Roman imperial adoption, since the buyer becomes nearly a son or daughter of the house as he begins to occupy it, or bits of it, while, by ancient French cynical conviction, the sudden onset of money combined with the power of spite extends the life of the older person out to the demoralizing edge of immortality.

Passard, fortunately, had bought the place from Mme. Baccarach, an impeccable French grande dame whose family has owned the château for centuries but who, as it happens, lived for thirty years in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and with whom he has a perfect long-term relationship: she loves to mind the house while he is content to work the grounds. While Madame prepares a table in the dining room, he begins the tour of the *potager*, with one of his gardeners, Mohamadou, a severe Frenchman of African origin.

"It is an organic garden but not merely an organic garden," Mohamadou says. "It's a vegetable garden controlled by the beasts. Do you know a garden only by its sights and smells? No. You know it, too, by its sounds. Listen!" The visitors cock their heads in the gasping heat and hear: the sounds of birds flying to nests specially provided for them in the orchard; the distant croaking of frogs in the pond that Passard has had dug in or-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der to have natural predators for crop-eating insects; and, off in the further distance, a lovely, slightly ominous buzz of bees. The garden has a set of wood-frame hives; the bees make honey for the restaurant. "Those are the sounds of a true garden," Mohamadou says. "We're bringing the birds back, and vipers to eat the mice, and frogs to eat the bugs. . . . It's a balance."

Alain Passard is a man in love with vegetables. For most of his career, though an infinitely inventive cook, he was famous for his roasts: particularly roasts of veal and lamb, cooked for six or seven hours *sur la plaque*, on the stove. Then, five years ago, he startled his diners, and his staff, by announcing that he would no longer cook red meat in his restaurant, and that he might phase out animal protein entirely. Today, though he will still throw a few *moules* or langoustines into his dishes, and there is usually fowl available for the incorrigible, the menu he prefers is made entirely of vegetables.

His garden in Sarthe is a showpiece of "permaculture," a system of intensive small-plot rotation that is intended to preserve the energies and resources of the soil. All the planting, for instance, is prepared traditionally, by horse-drawn plow, in order to prevent the soil from being torn up too deeply, as happens with tractors.

Mohamadou looks at Passard. "I saw you on television, chef," he says. "I approved of what you said about the single gesture." On a television program the night before, exploring the new, rococo cooking of the Spanish chefs, Passard had said that a single gesture on a plate was the right direction for the future of cooking, that one properly sliced tomato was a higher accomplishment than a tomato confit, that to get the single gesture right was harder than to make a set of gestures on the plate.

"I believe it," Passard says. "I believe it utterly. One sincere action from the garden is worth six skilled actions in the kitchen. When I'm in my kitchen, I shut my eyes and think that I'm here." He points all around. "And, by seeing myself here, I see what I want to do with the gardens." Passard is a handsome man, light on his feet, younger-looking than his forty-odd years, with a French schoolboy's face: hair *en brosse*, expression intensely earnest and open. "The other day I made a plate of tomatoes—just these tomatoes, sliced the right thickness, salted, and with a dab of balsamic. It was perfect."

The gardener nods seriously. "Of course, one gesture on the plate demands a thousand acts here in the garden," he says, and Passard nods in response.

Passard offers a comprehensive embrace, taking in the garden and the frogs and the birds and the budding vegetables. "I chose this place for many reasons," he says as he walks through vine-covered trellises. Off in the distance, golden cattle low. "It was important to be here in the Sarthe, in part because the soil is promising, neither too sickly rich nor too poor, and in part because it gave us excellent access to the TGV. That means we can pick vegetables at seven in the morning and have them in the kitchen to start making lunch at ten-thirty, and on the diner's plate at noon." He shakes a finger beside his nose, impressed by the efficiency of his own system. "They don't have to be refrigerated for their journey and they lose nothing, or nearly nothing. This fall, we're going to start selling what we don't use for the restaurant at a little counter at the Grande Épicerie at the Bon Marché, so that people who can't eat at the restaurant can still have an experience of true garden vegetables."

Passard continues his tour. "It's an experimental garden, too. We're trying to revive some of the great heirloom varieties of tomatoes and potatoes. We're trying to see what might happen. The beet, for instance, has never been completely appreciated." He leans down and gently brushes the dirt from a fat, dark beet. "We're raising larger, richer beets, and they have a potential that is vast! Enormous!" The new beets have inspired Passard to make an imposing *plat* in his kitchen: the beet is cooked in a crust of *gros sel*, as duck and lamb have been for centuries, and then the crust is broken with a flourish and the beet is delicately sliced and served, with a light *jus*, as the main course.

For lunch, in the château, Passard prepares a few single-gesture plates from the garden outside: tomatoes, potatoes, and a fine Comté and a bit of country bread from his city restaurant,

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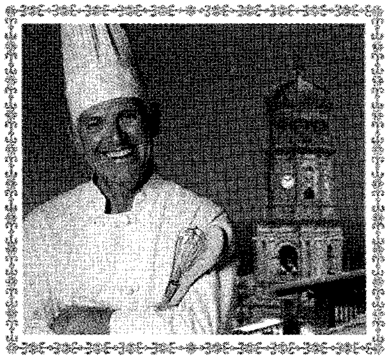

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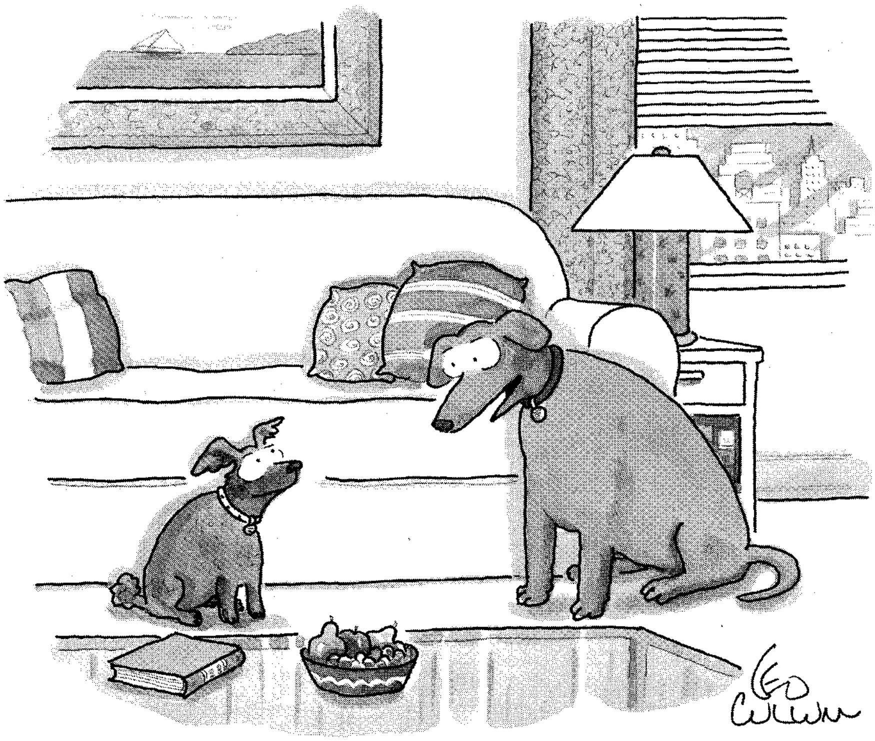

"I like our place in the country, but the only dogs I enjoy hanging out with there are also up from the city."

* * *

with a red wine from the Gascogne country, on a table that Madame has set beautifully with old china and etched glass and white linen.

"It was many things," he explains earnestly to Madame B. and his visitors, talking of his conversion experience, five years ago. "There was the fear of B.S.E. And for years I had been seeing new dimensions in vegetables when I cooked: green beans with peaches and almonds. Seeing them, but not seeing them all. But, especially, it was because I no longer wanted to be in a daily relationship with the corpse of an animal. I had a moment when I took a roast out into the dining room, and the reality struck me that every day I was struggling to have a creative relationship with a corpse, a dead animal! And I could feel inside me the weight and the sadness of the *cuisine animale.* And since then—gone! All the terrible nervousness and bad temper that are so much part of the burden of being a chef: that was gone with the old cooking. I entered into a new relation to my art, but also to my life. Everyone in the kitchen commented on it. And the lightness of what I was doing began to enter my body and my entire existence, and it entered into the existence of the kitchen. Digestively, yes, of course, but also spiritually, a new lightness of step and spirit that entered my life. It was like a light that I saw, and a door that I walked through. One day, I found myself regarding a carrot in a different light, and I saw the *cuisine végétale* ahead of me through an open door."

"Of course, we have always had many beautiful vegetables here in France, as they do in America," Madame B. says, in the classic style in which mannerly French people search for polite consensus while still speaking the truth. "But in America vegetables were always horribly overcooked. There would be this, and then that, with special utensils to fish them out."

"There have been great vegetable dishes in France," Passard says. "But no great vegetable chefs."

"Very true!" Madame says.

Like all classically trained French chefs, Passard has the sensitive, quick-turning eyes of one who learned at an early age, and from tough masters, that the world is not always easily at your service. (Passard apprenticed as a chef when he was fourteen, and subsequently

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worked for Gaston Boyer in Reims and, most important, for Alain Senderens at the old L'Archestrate, whose premises L'Arpège now occupies.) He therefore takes his preëminence as a chef seriously, but almost egolessly: that he has something special to contribute to French cooking is a fact independent of his desires, not so much an accomplishment as a grace. "It is the good fortune of vegetables to have at last found a great chef at the height of his powers to explore them," he says. He isn't being immodest, just truthful.

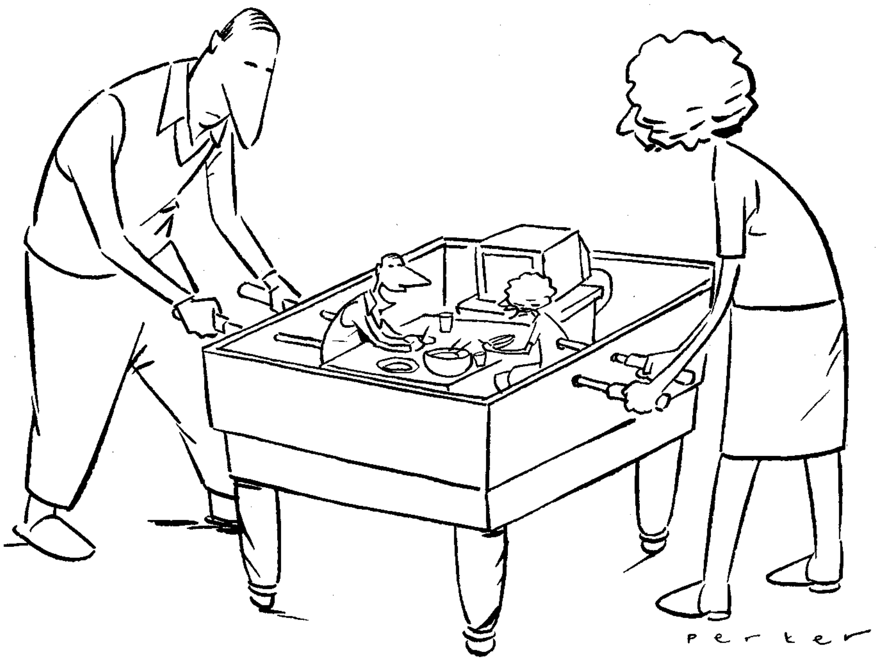
A typical *cuisine végétale* menu at his restaurant these days might include a tomato gazpacho with mustard ice cream (Passard makes the mustard himself); a gratin of white Cévenne onions with black pepper and baby lettuce; a langoustine bisque with a speck-scented cream; a consommé of cucumber with ravioli stuffed with lemongrass; a light soup of mussels with yellow flowers, ginger, and coriander ("The cuisine of flowers has hardly been touched, even by me," he said later); and a plate of summer root vegetables—carrots and new potatoes and small golden beets—dusted with couscous. For dessert, he offers a chocolate-and-avocado soufflé, the dark chocolate swirled into the rich and slightly eggy avocado, and a simple black-currant sorbet, made from black currants that were just in season in Sarthe.

In his new style, Passard has achieved a level of cooking that surpasses his earlier excellence, a fact that can be acknowledged even by those who think it prudent to eat an entire *côte de boeuf* the night before having lunch at his place. If some people will never quite get his cooking, his stature in France is indisputable, and with good reason. Cooking is both an expression of the essence of the ingredient and an attempt to turn it into something else; it's both melodic and harmonic. The old French cooking was all harmony, with the chicken breast or the sole treated as the bass note, and everything coming from what went on top. The new cooking, which has spread from America and Australia out into the world, is almost purely melodic: the unadorned perfect thing, singing the song of itself. Passard is among the few to cook both ways at once; one is intensely aware of the thing on the plate, and intensely aware of the mind of the chef that gets it there. The very best of what Passard is doing—say, the cucumber broth with herb ravioli—is as straightforward as a vegetable garden and as complex as the system that makes it run. (And not cheap, either, of course. Lunch costs a couple of hundred dollars per person—not surprising, given that the beet on your plate took the TGV to Paris that morning.)

He sharply distinguishes his *cuisine végétale* from vegetarian cooking. He is not a fan of raw vegetables, or of a health-conscious cuisine. "The real malady and unhappiness of vegetables has always been the vegetarian restaurant," he says. He sees cooking vegetables as an aesthetic challenge before anything else. "The white of chicken, or even a fillet of fish, cooking these things can be taught. But sautéing white onions, or a pan of turnips—that calls on every bit of the wisdom and knowledge and skill that a chef has accumulated in his training. Everyone in the kitchen has to pay attention in a new way. My team is alert and awake now in a way that it could never be before."

Passard's sense of purpose is undiluted by irony; if the objects of his cooking are beets and roots and tomatoes, the subject of his cooking is France. It is the French cooking tradition, the great tradition that began after the French Revolution and that he embodies. When, at L'Arpège, the single beet comes out of its crust of salt, or the cauliflower emerges from under a silver bell, where once there had been a rack of lamb, there is no conscious parody, but there is certainly an element of play, of a quiet joke—not at the expense of the old grand style but about the wit required to continue it by other means.

Cooking, we are told, ought to be a sensible craft, a peace-making practice, a human act of reconciliation and repetition, like gardening or popular song, rather than a place for experiment and extravagant imagination. Yet there is another kind of cooking, whose point is to press borders, turn corners, suggest extremes—extremes not merely of possible palates we might possess but of possible positions we might yet take. It is in these extremes, Carême's edifice-building or Escoffier's encyclopedism, that cooking touches the edge of something more. Both Henderson and Passard speak in conversation the language of realism: of the sensible, the healthy, the logical, the natural. But one feels in both, finally, an adherence less to a moral logic than to an aesthetic illogic: Passard was once Henderson, Henderson could easily become Passard; their real morality is that of the extreme case taken seriously. So perhaps one may be forgiven if one feels, in their single-mindedness, not common sense at all but something of that appetite for perversity which is at the root, and forces the flowers, of art. ♦



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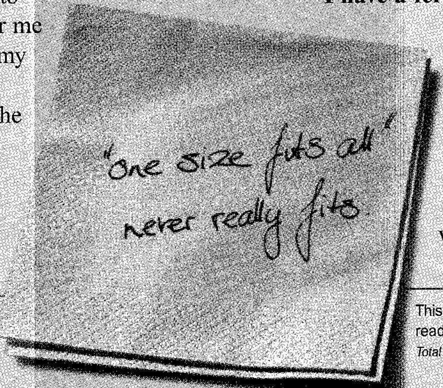

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TABOOS

PEACOCK

RUBEN TOLEDO

In the early nineties, it was possible to walk along the Zambian side of the upper Zambezi River without seeing many people—just a couple of fishermen, children out hunting for rats, or women in search of mopane worms. On the Zimbabwean side, blond savanna reached extravagantly into the distance and elephants often ventured out from the shelter of the bush to drink. Zambia, however, was considerably poorer than Zimbabwe in those days; anything remotely edible on our shore was quickly harvested, and large animals were scarce. Traditionally, ordinary people would not have eaten certain animals—hippos, for example—but a long ache of hunger had eroded the luxury of cultural norms and now nothing was exempt from culinary consideration.

An elderly Belgian aristocrat (unstitched from the wealth of her family by wars and bad luck) owned land here, where the river quickened into rapids as it made its way toward the waterfalls the locals called Mosi-oa-Tunya, "the smoke that thunders." Madame was a refugee of colonialism, remaindered from Zaire, but too possessed by Africa to return to Europe. She lived with several untrustworthy servants and a ragtag menagerie of peacocks, monkeys, dogs, cats, ducks, geese, chickens, and parrots.

My husband, Charlie, and I rented the cottage at the end of Madame's plot. There was only sporadic electricity and no running water—inconveniences that we happily overlooked in our excitement at finding ourselves beyond the reaches of the nearest town. Livingstone, at that time, was a noisy, disgruntled place. A riot had recently broken out in a textile factory and the Indian owners had been badly beaten up. Indians—the only community that seemed to thrive in difficult economic times—were universally mistrusted by their jealous Zambian neighbors.

While Charlie left each morning to run boat trips below Victoria Falls, I stayed in the cottage with our infant daughter and a mixed-breed dog called Liz. Madame quickly established the parameters of her relationship with me—we were to be cordial but formal—visiting each other by written invitation only. Ours was a friendship born of a mutual antipathy for society (we both preferred animals), and we gradually developed a genuine fondness for each other.

Then Liz killed a duck (she was caught in the act by Madame, her mouth lined with bloody feathers). Clough, Madame's gardener, brought over a brusque note on the afternoon of the murder, along with an invoice. Embarrassed, I sent cash and an apology by return post. Liz was confined to the barracks, except at night when she slept with us outside, where we had moved our bed to take advantage of the river breeze.

The following week, Liz allegedly killed a few more ducks and a half-dozen chickens. Madame, faced with such grave losses, came to see me without a letter of warning. The dog had acquired a taste for her livestock, she declared. I was responsible for "damages." Clough wrung his hands, and I knew, without a doubt, who was responsible for the killing spree. But Madame was scrupulously loyal to all her servants. To speak against them, I knew, was to speak against Madame herself. So I paid up with more apologies and a promise to keep Liz with me at all times.

When a peacock was killed several nights later—sent plummeting from its roost in a paperbark tree—I finally summoned up the courage to protest. "But, Madame," I said, "Liz could hardly have climbed all the way up there to kill a peacock."

"Clough found the body," Madame insisted. "He has taken it to be buried."

"Cooked, you mean," I muttered.

"Pardon?"

"Nothing," I said, counting out kwacha notes from my dwindling household budget.

Another peacock and two peahens met their deaths before I confronted Clough: "I know you're eating them."

"No." Clough mustered a look of indignation.

"It wasn't Liz."

"I am not the one. We can't eat peacocks. They are"—he searched for an excuse—"taboo for us."

"How can they be taboo? They aren't even native to this country. They're from India. How can something from India be taboo to you? Taboo means it must be something from your own culture."

Clough's face cleared. "Exactly. In our culture, we Zambians hate Indians. They are even worse than you. We wouldn't eat something of their country."

But the carnage stopped after that and my friendship with Madame survived, although very little else did. Eventually, Liz was killed by baboons, Madame sold the farm as a tourist camp, and we left Zambia for the less colorful comforts of the States.

—*Alexandra Fuller*

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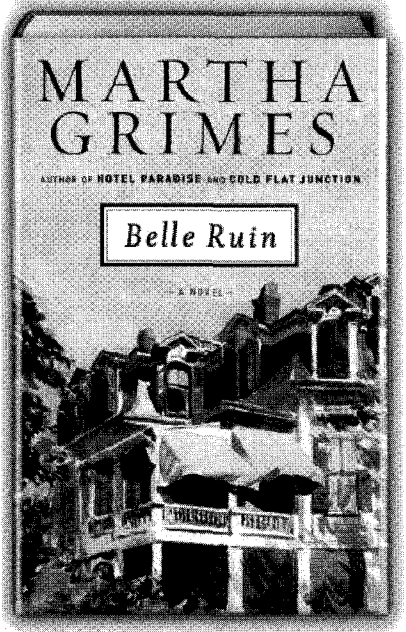

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ANNALS OF AGRICULTURE

RENAISSANCE PEARS

Saving the favorite fruits of the Medici.

BY JOHN SEABROOK

The Fiorentina is a squat and hippy pear, its dark-green skin blemished with black freckles. It is to supermarket fruit as real people are to supermodels. Until recently, the pear was thought to have disappeared from central Italy, where it once flourished. But Isabella Dalla Ragione, a forty-seven-year-old agronomist in Perugia, continued to look for it.

Dalla Ragione has straight brown hair and crooked teeth; she can look twenty years younger than her age or ten years older, depending on the angle of her head. She is a fast driver and an even faster talker, with a gift for making *archeologia arborea*, as she calls her vocation—the pursuit and recovery of old varieties of fruit—sound thrilling. She finds clues in many places: Renaissance paintings, obscure books, and the records that were kept by former estate owners in Umbria and Tuscany, where the climate is peculiarly advantageous for many kinds of fruit. Last year, while studying the catalogue of a large estate that once belonged to the Bufalini family, on the northern tip of Umbria, she came across a reference to the Fiorentina. The Bufalini maintained villas with extensive gardens and orchards, from the fifteenth century on up to the nineteen-eighties, when the final landlord left the property to the state.

Pear trees can live for more than two hundred and fifty years—among fruit trees, only olives live longer—and so Isabella thought a Fiorentina might remain on the former Bufalini lands. She knew what the pear looked like, thanks to a memoir left by an itinerant early-twentieth-century musician, Archimede Montanelli, whose travels had taken him all over Umbria. She also happened to have an uncle, Alvaro, who hunted in that part of Umbria and was acquainted with some of the farmers who lived there. Eventually, one of them told Alvaro that a Fiorentina remained on his farm.

Earlier this summer, I accompanied Isabella on a trip to visit the old pear tree. We drove into a mountainous region above the town of Pietralunga, a land of thick woods with small farms in the valleys. Stone houses where the landowners had once lived, many of them now abandoned, sit on the tops of hills. The old orchards are gone, but the landscape is dotted with a few rugged arboreal survivors: almonds, olives, and pears.

The Fiorentina was growing in the Valdescura, the Valley of Darkness. When we arrived, relatives of several families, spanning four generations, were sitting under the big shade trees outside the farmhouse. The matriarch was an eighty-four-year-old woman named Sergia. She wore a ragged shift and filthy slippers, and carried a long walking stick. Hearing my accent, she recalled the Americans who had escaped from a nearby Fascist prison and turned up one night in 1943; she had given them shelter and something to eat.

There was a cherry tree beside the house, and Isabella walked with Sergia to gather some cherries. Or, rather, Isabella gathered them; Sergia ate them, the pits tumbling down her whiskery chin as more cherries went into her mouth.

Then the farmer, a nephew of Sergia's, led us through a potato field to the Fiorentina, which was growing next to a rutted old road. Its black bark had deep crevices, and the trunk and lower branches were covered with scabrous white lichen. Isabella fought through the high weeds around the tree and patted its trunk. "Sometimes when I find one of these old trees I feel like weeping," she said. "If only they could talk—what a story they could tell." Then she frowned, and said, "But

I think, Maybe it is better they cannot talk. They would probably curse us."

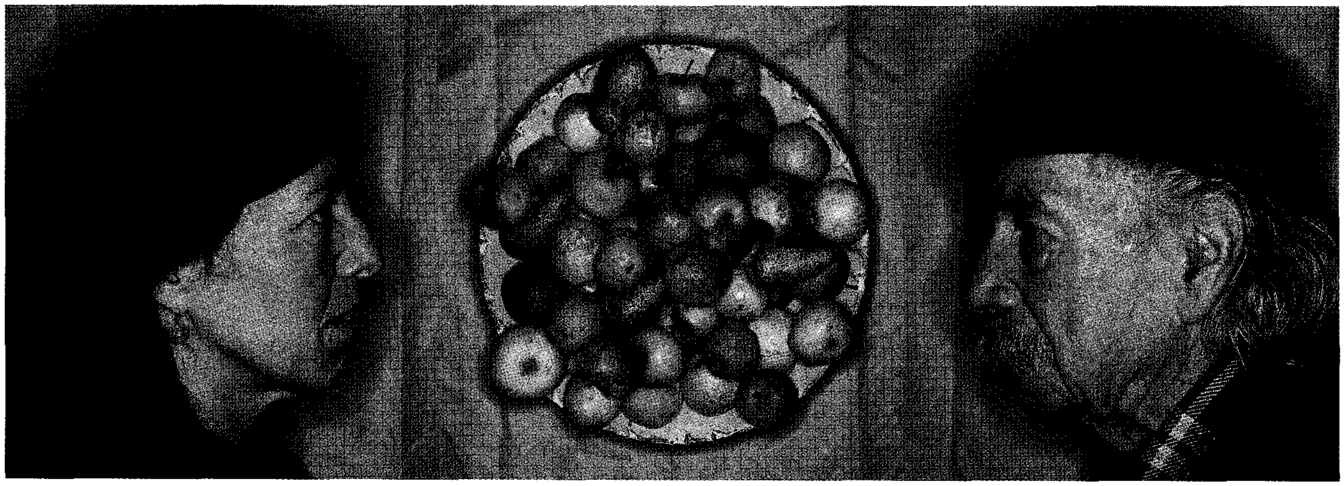
For thousands of years, peasants in Umbria and Tuscany cultivated fruit trees. Most tended small *pomari,* or family orchards, with no more than ten trees. A fruit tree provided food, shade in summer, fuel in winter, furniture, and children's shoes, which were made from the wood of fig trees. Fruit was also a staple of the cooking of the region, in dishes like salt cod with roasted pears, and pork with plums; whole cherries in *agrodolce*—pickled in vinegar and sugar—were served as a chutney with roasted meat. The farmers planted as many varieties as possible, because the different trees would bear fruit at different times over the growing season. The mountainous topography of Umbria, and its lack of roads, insured that varieties common to one valley were unknown in the next. When a woman married, she often carried seeds from her family's farm with her, in order to prepare her mother's recipes, which were based on the particular varieties of fruit in her home valley.

This feudal way of life endured, more or less unbroken, for two thousand years, until it abruptly ended in the two decades following the Second World War. Nine million Italians, about a sixth of the population at that time, left their rural homes and went to the cities. They acquired Fiats, Vespas, televisions, and fashionable clothes—all the trappings of modern Italian identity. The old fruit trees were among the things they left behind.

The varieties eaten in Umbria and Tuscany were replaced, first, by generic fruit grown in the Emilia-Romagna region, where much of Italy's agricultural industry is concentrated, and, more recently, by fruit from other countries—peaches and cherries from Spain, pears from Argentina, and apples from China. In most markets in Italy you can find only three kinds of apple (Golden Delicious, Stark Delicious, Rome Beauty), and lately the Fuji apple, from China, has begun to replace those. It's not hard to imagine a day when there will be only one kind of apple for sale in the whole industrial world.

The Dalla Ragiones' orchard is an open-air museum of Old World fruit. It was begun by Isabella's father, Livio, forty years ago, on his land in northwestern Umbria, and is now maintained by Isabella. The trees grow on a hilltop in San Lorenzo di Lerchi, a hamlet about seventy miles southeast of Florence and thirty miles northwest of Perugia; Livio lives in a stone farmhouse that overlooks the orchard. There are about four hundred trees in the collection: pears, apples, plums, cherries, peaches, quinces, and medlars. Most were common in Umbria as recently as sixty years ago; now they have all but disappeared. Some of the Dalla Ragiones' specimens are believed to be the last examples of that variety.

Livio Dalla Ragione was born in Pieve Santo Stefano, about twenty miles north of San Lorenzo; his father was a railroad worker. When Italy entered the war, on the German side, in 1940, Livio, then nineteen, was conscripted. In old photographs, one can see a very tall, handsome young man in military uniform. But he soon became disillusioned with Fascism, and in the summer of 1943, not long before Italy signed an armistice with the Allies, he and a few friends were arrested for singing a song called "Death to the House of Savoy" during an inspection by King Vittorio Emanuele III. Livio escaped from a train taking him to prison, and made his way back to northwestern Umbria, where he joined the partisans. He was a lieutenant in the Gruppo San Faustino, one of several partisan bands that managed to keep the Germans from securing positions in central Italy until the Allies arrived in Rome, in June, 1944.


Isabella and Livio Dalla Ragione with fruits from their orchard of ancient trees, in San Lorenzo di Lerchi, Umbria.

HANS GISSINGER

Livio played a leading role in several celebrated *partigiani* actions, including an ambush on an armored German column near the ancient walls of Città di Castello, an attack on a German arms depot at Gubbio, and the defense of the town of Pianello against a force of some five hundred S.S. troops, in which the Germans lost more than a hundred men and the *partigiani* lost only three. The rugged terrain was ideal for guerrilla warfare. The partisans could carry out operations east toward Gubbio or northwest toward Florence, then disappear into the remote high valleys and the barns and farmhouses of the local farmers, who sometimes lost their farms, and their lives, in German reprisals. Livio was eventually awarded one of Italy's highest citations for valor, the Silver Medal, for his actions during

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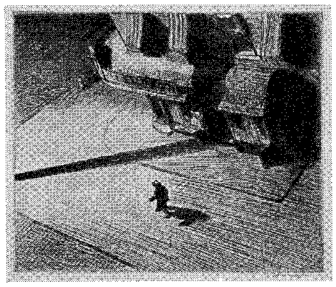

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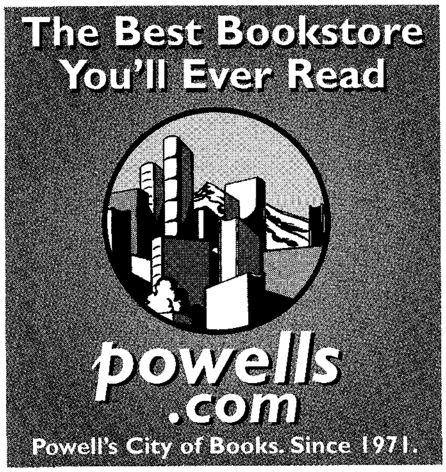

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these years. His exploits are recounted in "Guerrilla in Striped Pants," a memoir by Walter W. Orebaugh, an American diplomat who fought alongside him.

After the war, Livio moved to Rome. In the nineteen-fifties, he was part of an important Roman abstract-art scene, centered on the Via Margutta, which included the sculptor Ettore Colla. Livio worked in a style called *informale*, which emphasized the use of collage and found objects; his paintings often included pieces of wood or metal from old tools that were used by the peasants he had come to know during the war. Other paintings featured the colorful droppings of an owl called an *allocco*. Livio participated in a number of exhibitions in Rome, and in the early sixties he received an offer to be part of a show in Chicago, but he turned it down, and after that his career as a painter began to decline.

Around this time, Livio began collecting the *cultura materiale* of the Umbrian peasantry. He picked up tools in abandoned farmhouses—knives for harvesting olives, pitchforks made out of forked branches—and rescued larger mechanical pieces as well, such as presses for olive oil and looms for weaving linen (for the landowners) and hemp (for the peasants). Just as the farmers had succored him and his partisan comrades, so Livio intended to save the farmers from the American-style consumer culture that Italy embraced after the war, or at least to preserve the memory of their way of life. He took over the house at San Lorenzo, which had been empty for years and was falling into ruin, and gradually restored it, filling it with his found farm objects. Eventually, he accumulated so many things that he moved most of them into a former farm building just outside Città di Castello. This collection is now a museum, the Folk Traditions Center, run by the city. Arboreal archeology was one aspect of Livio's larger obsession with Italy's prewar past. "I had these tools, all these things," he told me, "but I also wanted to save the smells and tastes of those times. So I began trying to save the trees."

Isabella was born in 1957, the second of Livio's two daughters; her older sister, Laura, is a psychiatrist specializing in children's eating disorders. When the girls were small, they and their mother, Rosa, spent the summers in a cabin in the woods, without electricity or running water. Isabella remembers making a *favola*—a fairy house—inside the hollow trunk of a chestnut tree. "My idea of the world as green comes from seeing the sun come through the thin bark of my chestnut tree," she told me.

At the time, Livio's celebration of the culture of the peasants stopped short of wanting to live like one. In the late fifties and early sixties, he rarely stayed with his family in the country; he preferred Rome. When Isabella was still young, she became aware that her father was living, as she called it, "a double life." By the time she was eighteen, and studying for a degree in agronomy at the University of Perugia, she had become interested in theatre, and joined an experimental acting troupe that embraced the improvisational principles of the Polish playwright and director Jerzy Grotowski. "I think I just wanted to get as far away from my father's world as I could," Isabella told me. "It was not easy to have that kind of man as a father—a great man, a strong, important man. It is hard to find your own way."

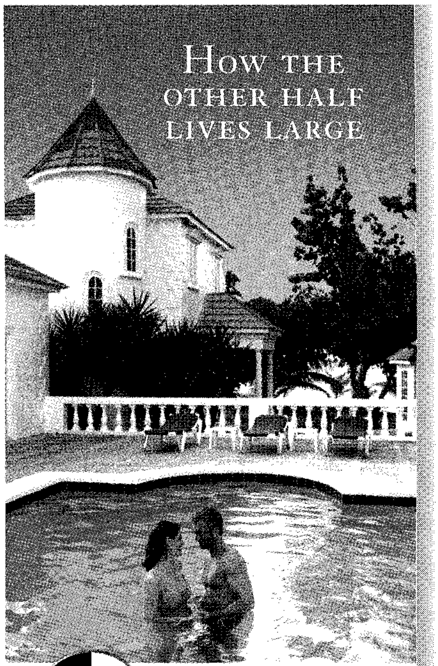
After ten years of acting and sporadic studies, Isabella finished her master's degree. She found a job with the city of Perugia, working on its trees. She married Leonardo Tei, a master builder, and they have two daughters, Costanza, who is eleven, and Matilde, who is nine. Livio, in the meantime, had been teaching drawing and painting at two small art schools near Perugia and planting the orchard at San Lorenzo. "It was natural," Isabella says, "with my degree and knowledge, that I started to go with my father, to find fruits and plants." She was skilled at grafting—a technique that involves taking a living piece of the plant one wants to reproduce (known as the "scion"), inserting it into a cleft in the stalk of an already established plant (the "rootstock"), and tying the two plants together. Grafting was practiced by peasants for centuries, and it is the reason that so many old varieties could be preserved for so long. It is a quicker and more reliable way of reproducing trees than growing them from seed, because the rootstock is already established and is known to be compatible with the soil. Because grafting is an asexual form of reproduction, the new tree is not a cross between the rootstock and the scion but a copy of the scion.

As the collection grew, Isabella's relationship with her father improved. The trees helped. She has written several books about her work, including an illustrated catalogue of the collection. As Livio has grown older and more infirm, Isabella has taken on more of the daily maintenance of the orchard: pruning, fertilizing, and grafting. The hardest work comes in the late winter and early spring, when the grass is cut, the soil prepared, paths cleared, and the trees treated with copper, to inhibit the growth of fungi. Isabella and Livio get occasional help from volunteers, but they can't afford to hire a full-time assistant, and they have distanced themselves from the Slow Food movement, an Italian association that promotes and preserves the artisanal production of food, because Isabella dislikes its politics. ("They really only exist to promote themselves," she told me.) The Dalla Ragiones don't sell fruit, but they do sell saplings grafted from trees in the collection. Isabella charges thirteen to fifteen euros for each sapling, and last year she sold about two hundred. Three years ago, they received a grant of fifteen thousand euros for *archeologia arborea* from the Umbrian regional government, and Isabella and Livio were able to print two thousand brochures, create labels for the trees, and launch a Web site. But that money ran out in May, and there will be no more, Isabella said, because "biodiversity is not a political priority in Italy." From now on, the Dalla Ragiones' only source of funding will be from tourists, who may visit the orchard by appointment and are encouraged to contribute to the cost of maintaining it by adopting a tree.

The idea of using still-life paintings as forensic tools occurred to Isabella in the early nineteen-nineties. Italian Renaissance and Baroque *natura morta* painting is distinguished from much of the Northern European tradition of still-life by its naturalism. Generally, the fruit in Italian paintings is not treated symbolically or didactically, as it is in Flemish and Dutch painting. "The natural fecundity of the fruit itself was symbolism enough in Italian still-lifes," Larry Feinberg, the Ryan Curator in the Department of European Painting at the Art Institute of Chicago, says. "If the fruit was a symbol of anything, it was of abundance, richness, good fortune." In Caravaggio's work, the fruit often has wormholes and looks a little too soft, Feinberg added. It has become a symbol of "*vanitas*—of overripeness, or sensuality."

Three of the most useful artists for identifying old varieties of fruit are Jacopo Ligozzi (1547-1627), Giovanna Garzoni (1600-70), and Bartolomeo Bimbi (1648-1729), all of whom worked for Medici Grand Dukes—Francesco I, Ferdinand II, and Cosimo III, respectively—recording the flowers and fruits that grew in their gardens. Ligozzi was the most botanically correct of the artists, as interested in root systems as in surface texture. Garzoni was a miniaturist who painted with gouache on vellum; her masterly series of fruits and flowers that grew in the Medici gardens now hangs in the Galleria Palatina in Florence's Pitti Palace, where Isabella has consulted it many times. Bimbi, who came a generation later, was a very different kind of painter: a creator of epic, almost bombastic still-lifes, done in oil on huge canvases.

The Medici gardens were begun by Lorenzo, and maintained, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, by his successors, most avidly by Cosimo I, an ardent naturalist who established the first botanical garden in Europe, in Pisa. Keeping a large orchard was a way of showing one's allegiance to "scientific humanism," a core principle of the Renaissance. In an orchard, the most sensuous pleasures of the natural world are carefully constrained by planning, pruning, and cultivating—resulting in a synthesis of nature and science. The orchard's civilizing effect seems to have diminished over time. The virtues of the humanistic gardens had little influence, for example, over the notoriously depraved Gian Gastone, the last of the Medici. After one banquet, having eaten and drunk to gross excess, as



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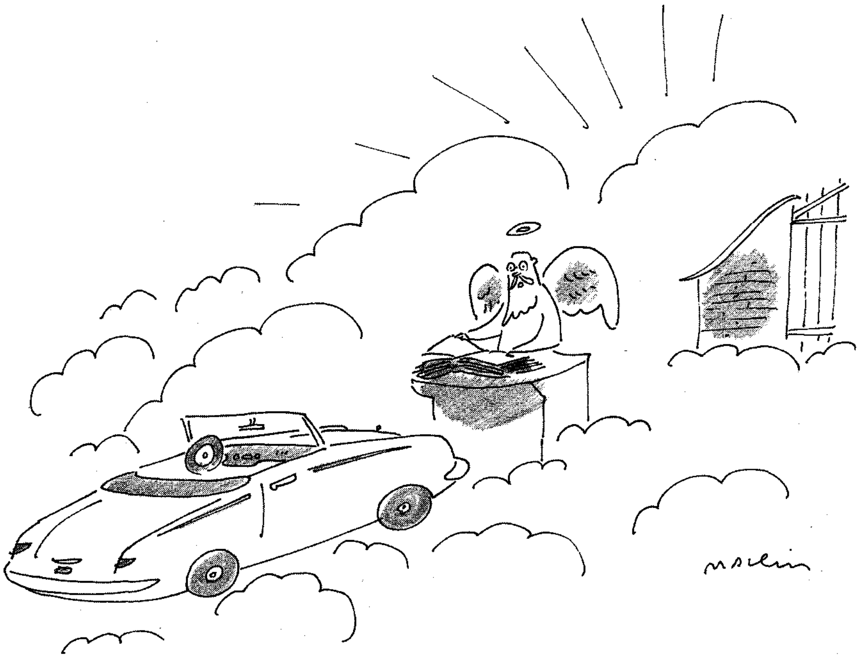

"If our records are correct, you died, quite suddenly, on the Long Island Expressway."

• •

Christopher Hibbert relates in "The House of Medici: Its Rise and Fall," Gian Gastone vomited into his napkin and then wiped his mouth with his wig.

Bimbi's fruit paintings hang in the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano, about fifteen miles west of Florence, a property that now belongs to the state. I asked Isabella to come with me to see them. We met at her house, in the oldest part of Perugia; the stones in the foundations are Etruscan. The autostrada was crowded, and Isabella drove aggressively, cursing the slower drivers in colorful Italian. After exiting, we drove through an ugly industrial area, where most of the roadside signs were in Chinese, because so many of the workers were from China. When we finally got to the villa, the custodian said that the Bimbi rooms were closed. However, since there were few other visitors, he shrugged and said that he supposed he could open them for us.

The paintings occupied two rooms. There were twelve big canvases of fruit grouped by type—citrus, cherries, plums, apples—all captured in the fleeting moment of perfect ripeness, fresh forever. The largest and most astonishingly detailed of the works was "Pears," which depicts a hundred and fifteen different varieties, collected in six baskets labelled by the month in which they ripen, June through December. In the background, there are classical columns and a stormy twilight sky. The artist, denied all but the visual sense to convey the essence of the fruit, concentrated on the texture and color of the skin. The result is not so much a still-life as a psychological portrait of fruit. These are the pears in the Wallace Stevens poem "Study of Two Pears":

> The pears are not viols,
> Nudes or bottles.
> They resemble nothing else.

Bimbi thoughtfully numbered the pears, and provided a key at the bottom of the canvas, so that they can be identified by name. As we were standing in front of the painting, Isabella pointed out that he must have worked on the painting periodically over the growing season, as the different varieties ripened; otherwise the early-summer pears would have rotted by the time the winter pears were ripe.

Afterward, we walked around the galleries, looking at the other paintings.

"Wait," she said, noticing that one of the fruits in "Lemons" was actually a *mela rosa*—a rose apple. Was this a hidden symbol or a mistake? "I think he must have put it there for a reason," Isabella said. It was another mystery for an arboreal archeologist.

San Lorenzo is in the part of northern Umbria known as the Alta Valle del Tevere—the Upper Tiber Valley. The source of Rome's river is nearby. The Dalla Ragiones' trees grow on the southern slopes of the hill. The ground drops steeply away. The sound of rushing water comes up from below, but the valley is so deep that the stream can't be seen.

In past centuries, there were orchards on the hill, but the fruit trees had nearly all died by the time Livio started planting, in the early nineteen-sixties. Now the only old trees in the orchard are some olives and almonds. His house is larger than it looks, with additions built over the centuries; the original part is a thousand years old. A church near the house, where the bones of some eighteenth-century nobles are buried under the floor, now serves as a fruit warehouse. Old tools and weapons and farm implements hang everywhere, rusty and vaguely menacing, suggestive of hard work and poverty and struggle.

Livio lives alone, although his lady friend, Miriam Fiorellino, comes up from Rome for the weekend. (His wife, Rosa, died three years ago.) Laura, Isabella's sister, visits infrequently, but Isabella makes the forty-five-minute drive from Perugia two or three times a week. She checks on her grafts, and then walks around the hillside with a straightened-out paper clip, killing caterpillars that have bored into the tree trunks. The orchard is watched over by Livio's colorful scarecrows, one of which is decked out in a flashy car-racing suit and helmet (in the winter, skis are added), but they seem intended as much to keep away people as birds. Anyway, the birds somehow know exactly when the cherries will turn from white to red, and they often devour them before Isabella can gather the crop.

Meals at San Lorenzo are usually simple, cooked by Miriam and Isabella, who employ as many homegrown ingredients as possible. They use fruit in much of their cooking. Their wine, made by stomping red and white grapes together in the big wooden vats downstairs in the cantina, is a light, fruity rosé; Livio drinks it cold, diluting it

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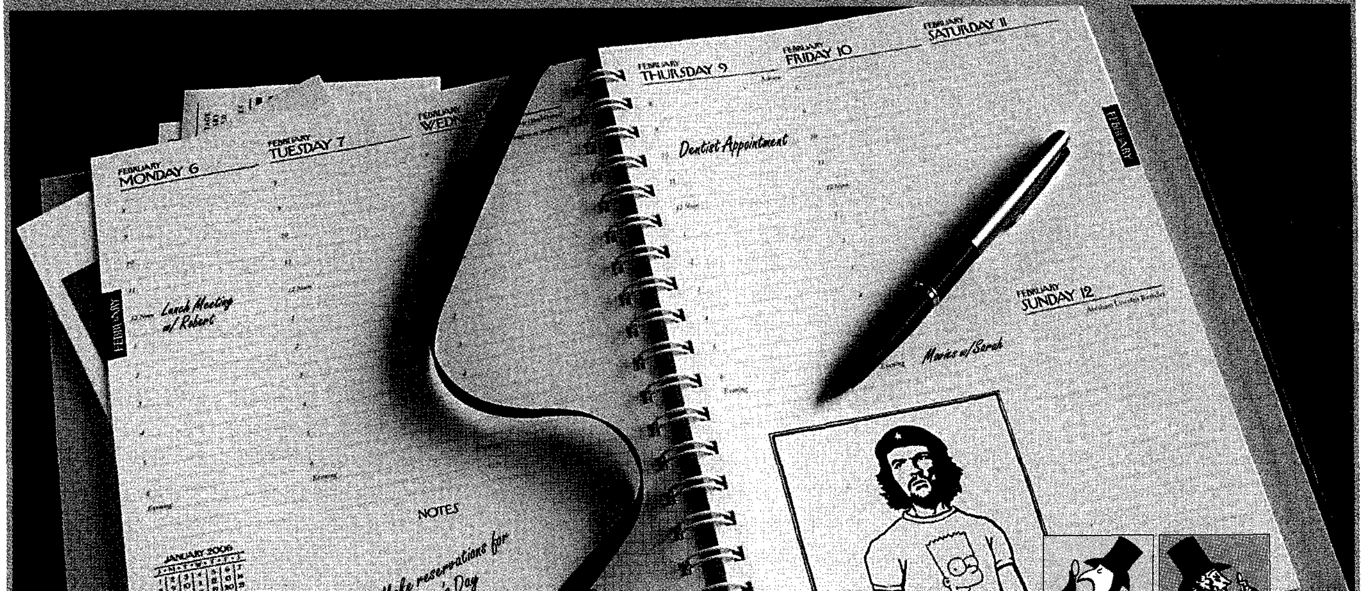
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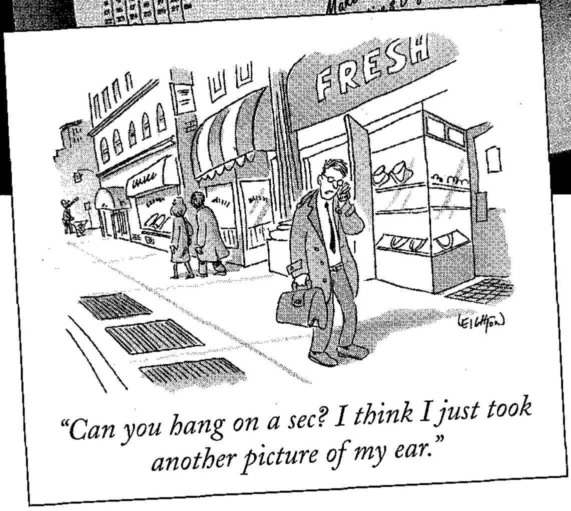

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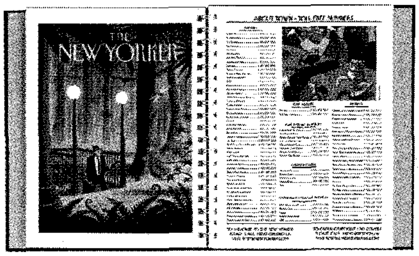
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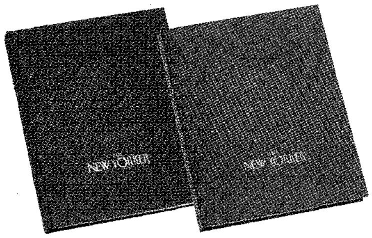
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with water. (Isabella doesn't drink.) A typical meal begins with a soup made from local wild mushrooms, served with bread baked with chestnut flour in a corner of the huge fireplace in the kitchen and followed by a casserole of artichoke, potato, and prosciutto, with chestnut and rosemary cookies or a fruit tart for dessert. The Dalla Ragiones keep many of the traditional Umbrian festivals, and at the end of the year they burn La Vecchia, the effigy of an old woman made of rags and straw, and Livio curses—"*Vaffanculo, anno vecchio!*" ("Up your ass, old year!")—and spits into the fire.

When I visited San Lorenzo in January, we ate the last of the winter pears. They had a sharp, challenging flavor, and were firm and crisp and cold. (The fireplace and a wood-burning stove provide the only heat in the house, and last winter there was three feet of snow on the ground.) The taste was so clean—not buttery, which is the standard by which the commercial pear is bred—that it was almost metallic. "I am convinced that people's taste has changed as a result of the industrialization of fruit production," Isabella said. "The *mela rustica*, for example, which is described in old travellers' accounts as tasting like vinegar, now tastes rather sweet."

Livio is still the genius loci, as Isabella calls him, of the orchard, but, at eighty-four, he is much diminished from his prime. "He is like the Babbo Natale and I am like the elf who makes the toys," Isabella said. Livio has a long white fringe of hair around his bald, speckled, Shakespearean dome, and he has the hopeful expression that very old men get in their eyes. He is gruff and blustery, and Isabella treats him as she does the fruit trees—tenderly but firmly. She worries about his health. "The time is coming," Isabella said, "when we must think about the end—and what this project of ours will be without my father." She was feeling overwhelmed, she added, by caring for the four hundred trees, with little help, knowing that a lost tree might mean the end of that variety forever. "Lately, I have come to feel that the life I have chosen is not my own," she said.

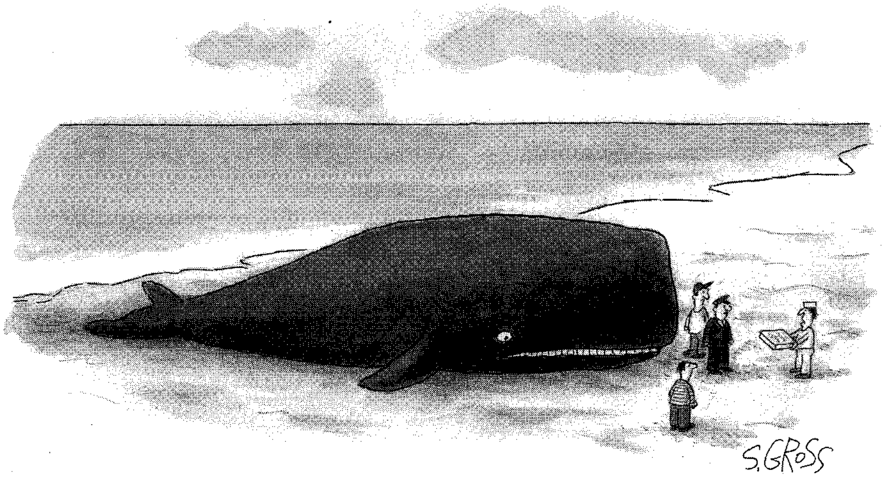
None of Livio's paintings are on view in the house, and when I asked him where they were he told me he had burned them all years ago, adding that the only remaining painting was in the collection of the wife of Jean Arp, the French Dadaist. (Actually, Isabella told me that he had a couple of paintings squirrelled away inside the house, although I saw only photographs of them.) One day, when we were having lunch under the big olive trees, I asked Livio why he had burned his paintings, and he barked, "*Perché tutto quello era finito*" ("Because all that was finished") and did not elaborate. He had not only stopped painting; he had turned against the whole practice of making art and become what he calls *un'artista del pensiero*—an artist of thought. The orchard is his *natura morta*.

Last September, Isabella staged a *mostra pomologica*—a fruit show—in the center of Perugia, in an old palazzo that now belongs to the Bank of Umbria. It featured fruit from the collection—plums, quinces, medlars, apples, and pears—arranged in palm-frond baskets, in the casually sensuous style of Garzoni. Each basket was illuminated by an overhead light. Most of the visitors assumed that the fruit was made of marble or wax—the flyers that Isabella had put up around town had been intentionally ambiguous about whether this was to be a produce fair or an art exhibit.

Many of the younger people laughed when they discovered that the fruit was real. Perhaps the musky, slightly too fecund scent of ripe fruit made them giddy, or maybe the fruit was just funny-looking. The seeds rattled inside some of the apples, like natural castanets. Isabella, however, was more interested in the reactions of the elderly visitors, who are the last living link to the old trees. She was hoping that they would provide some clues to fruit she still hasn't found—perhaps the variety of fig called Fico Rondinino San Sepolcro, which she has been seeking for years.

The elderly people were mostly former sharecroppers, who had dressed formally for their trip to the city. At first, they were inclined to be circumspect and seemed reluctant to answer Isabella's questions. "In many of their memories, the fruit is connected to hunger and hardship," Isabella said. "They aren't good memories." However, the smell and the texture of the fruit soon dissolved their inhibitions. One old woman, from Gualdo Tadino, near Gubbio, remembered how she and her husband used to keep fruit under their bed, where it was cool; the thought made her blush. A farmer remembered how the landowner he worked for had told him he didn't want a particular kind of pear tree growing on his land, and the man had said he would get rid of it. But that night he went to the tree and whispered, "Don't worry, I didn't mean it."

The most exciting piece of arboreal information came from a former nun, who told Isabella she remembered a Fico Rondinino San Sepolcro growing in the convent in Bevagna, near Assisi. Isabella visited the convent as soon as she could, but she was too late. The sisters had cut the old figs down and replaced them with a healthy young kiwi tree. ♦



"Who ordered the krill pizza?"

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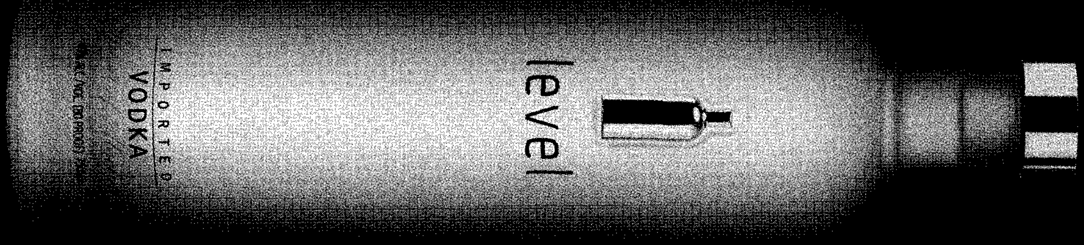

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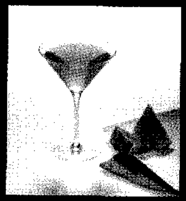

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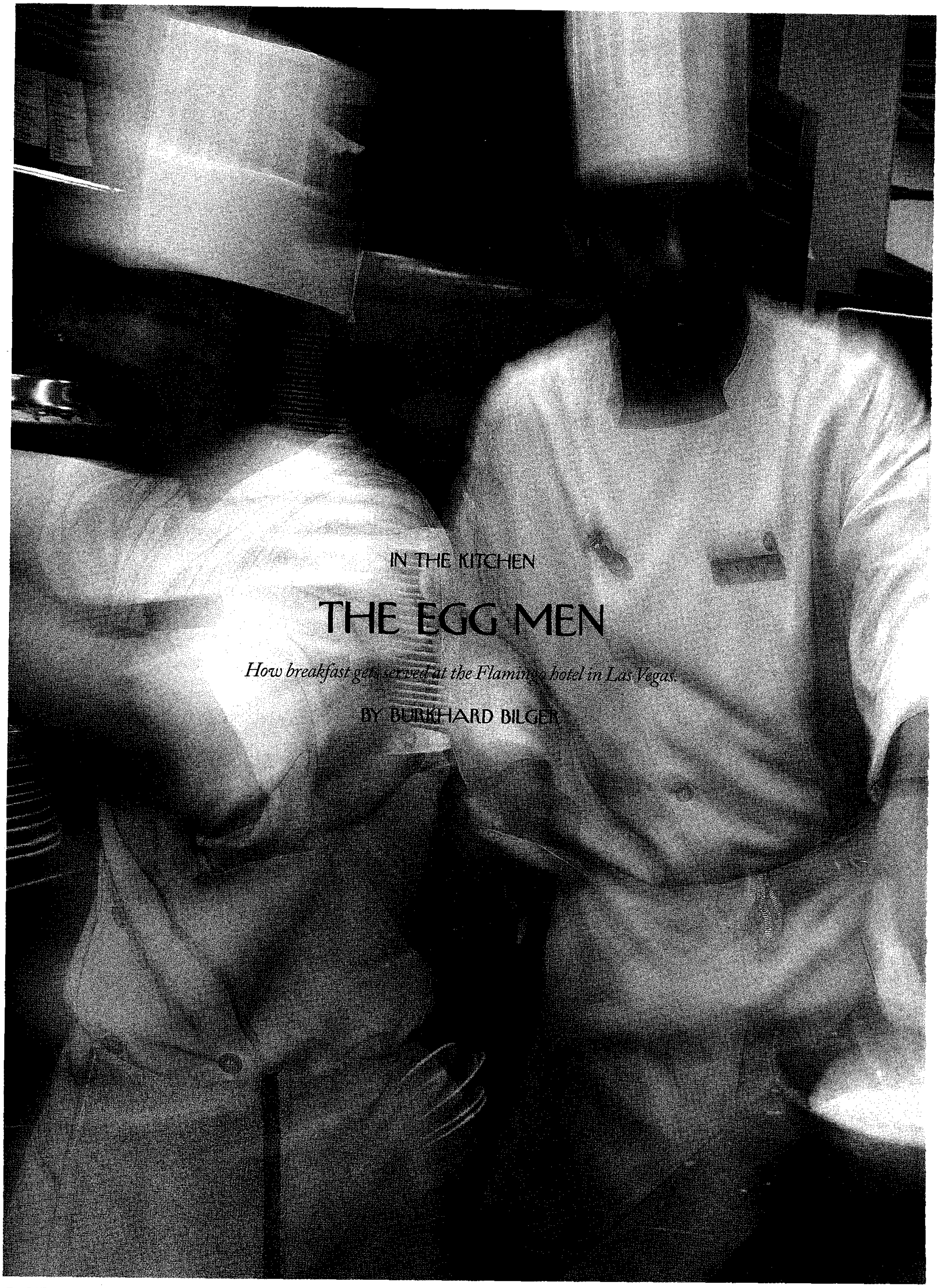
IN THE KITCHEN

THE EGG MEN

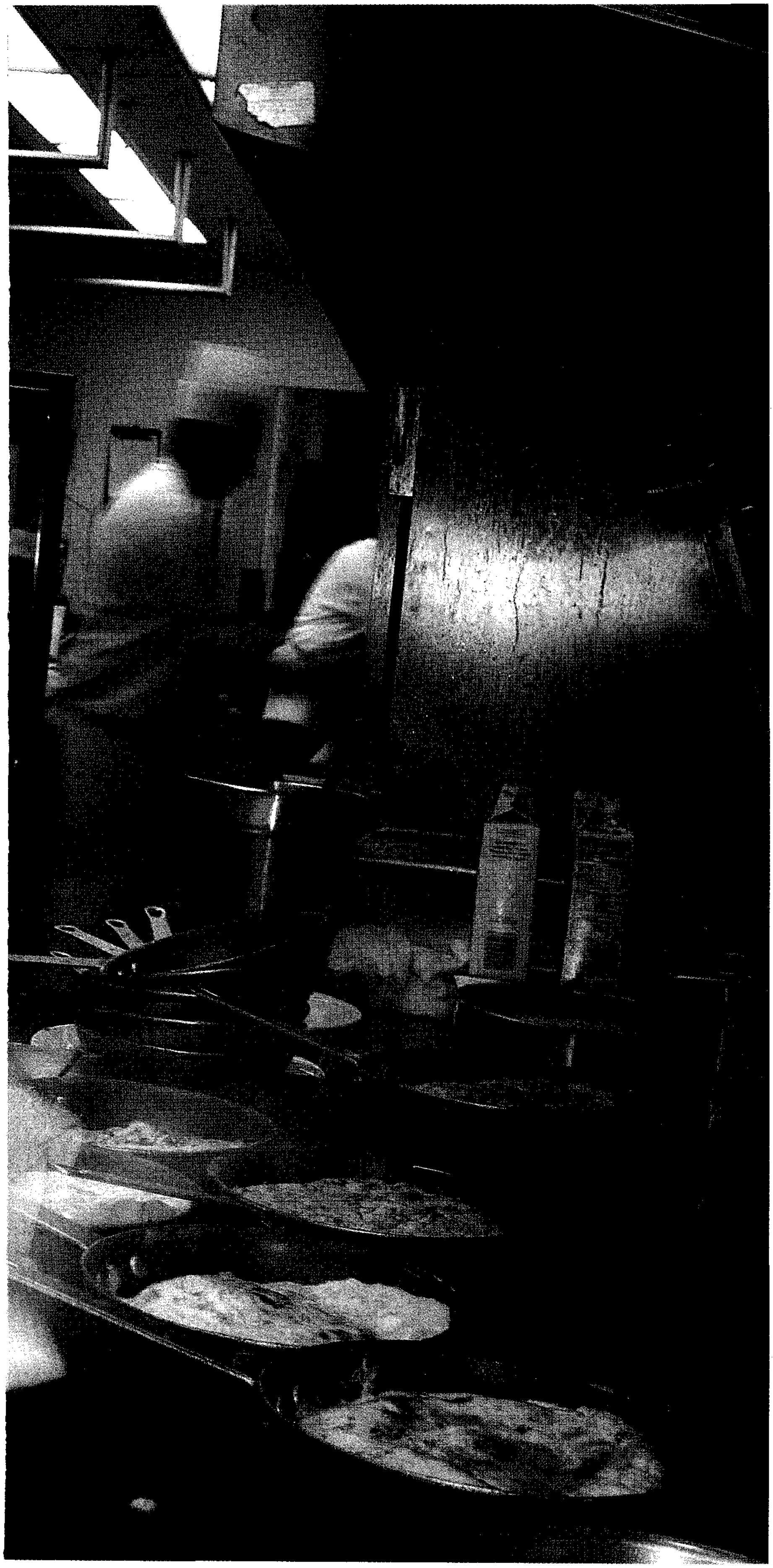
How breakfast gets served at the Flamingo hotel in Las Vegas.

BY BURKHARD BILGER



HANS GISSINGER

Joel Eckerson and Martin Nañez Moreno: Last year, the cooks at the Flamingo coffee shop cracked well over a million eggs. A culin



ion representative says, "Egg cooks are worth their weight in gold in this town."

Las Vegas is a city built by breakfast specials. Sex and gambling, too, of course, and divorce and vaudeville and the creative use of neon. But the energy for all that vice had to come from somewhere, and mostly it came from eggs. In the early days, when depositing your savings in machines designed to cheat you still seemed a dubious proposition, the casinos offered cut-rate rooms and airfares. And eggs, always eggs. "They used to line up down the hall for the ninety-nine-cent special," a cook from the old Lindy's café in the Flamingo told me. "One time, so much grease built up in the ceiling that it came down the walls and set fire to the flat-tops. Pretty soon, the hood caught on fire and the extinguishers went off with that chemical that looks like smoke, and then the Fire Department came in. Everybody just kept on eating. They said, 'Does this mean my food will take longer now?' "

The ninety-nine-cent special has been lost to history: the new Vegas rarely stoops to giveaways. The empty stretch of desert where Bugsy Siegel built the Flamingo, in 1946, has become the center of the Strip, home to America's thirteen largest hotels. (The MGM Grand, which has 5,044 rooms, is the largest; the Flamingo is eighth, with 3,545.) Up the street, at the Wynn hotel, which opened this spring, two eggs can cost eleven-fifty, and a caviar breakfast for two with Dom Perignon is three hundred and fifty dollars from room service. Even Lindy's has had a makeover. It calls itself the Tropical Breeze Café now. Its nicotine-yellow walls have been repainted a sunnier shade, and it looks out on a water garden populated by turtles, koi, and some disgruntled-looking penguins from southern Africa.

Still, a good egg, honestly cooked, is what brings in most customers, and they eat them in staggering quantities. Last year alone, the cooks at the Tropical Breeze cracked well over a million of them. As a woman at the local Culinary Workers Union put it, "Egg cooks are worth their weight in gold in this town."

At six o'clock on a recent Saturday morning, a few early risers and ashen-faced all-nighters were already gathered in front of the café hostess. Scott Gutstein, the café's head chef, could hear the white noise of their chatter picking up

"She's a doormat with teeth."

volume, like the leading edge of some oceanic weather system. "You can feel it building," he said, sitting in his cramped office next to a walk-in refrigerator. "I worked swing shift last night. Busy. When I came out at midnight, the streets were packed." He scanned the inventory list on his computer one more time—on an average day, the Tropical Breeze consumes some three hundred pounds of bacon alone—then buttoned up his white, double-breasted jacket. He checked the pocket on his left sleeve for his kitchen implements, which were color-coded for quick access: blue thermometer, red paring knife, black pager, yellow highlighter. Then he leaned over to read a handwritten sheet taped on the door by his assistant chef.

"O.K., here's the lineup," he said. "We've got Martin, the omelette man, and Joel on over-easies. René is doing pancakes and French toast—he's so strong, he just pushes it out—and we have Debbie on the eggs Benedict. I'm not used to watching women cook in high-stress situations, but she's surprised the shit out of me. She kicks ass. Frankie will do the steak and eggs, and Edgar will fill in for whoever is taking a break." He grinned. "You can't hurt these guys. I mean, I've been all over the country in all kinds of kitchens. I've worked in New Jersey. I've worked in L.A. I thought I saw the best, but these guys? *Nasty*."

Gutstein, who is thirty-eight, was born in the Bronx and raised in Yonkers, a loyal Yankees fan even in their most fruitless years. He keeps a dusty Don Mattingly mug on his desk and a picture of Joe DiMaggio at spring training on the wall, and likes to think of his cooks as their short-order equivalents. When he describes their feats at the grill, his voice grows clipped and overheated, like an announcer's on AM radio: "I thought Bally's was busy next door. This place annihilates it. By a thousand covers a day. With less people." Gutstein has a round, eager face that's perpetually flushed, with pale eyebrows and fleshy earlobes. He has wide brown eyes and short, sausagy arms, and the over-all demeanor of a very large and very precocious toddler, given to bursts of impatience and spleen, but mostly just happy to be there, watching things flip and whirl around him.

Saturday morning is zero hour for short-order cooks. The café, which prepares some twenty-five hundred meals on an average weekday, may serve an extra thousand on weekends, with the same cooks. As Gutstein made his way down the long galley kitchen, between the line of grills, griddles, and deep fryers against the wall and the stainless-steel serving counter, with its hot lights and warming trays, his cooks were entrenching themselves for the breakfast rush. They plunged quadruple baskets of chopped potatoes into hot oil, pre-poached three dozen eggs, and mixed hash in a tub the size of a baptismal font. Busboys squeezed past with stacks of plates two feet high. Runners jogged in with carts of diced peppers and onions, mushrooms, bacon, and shredded cheese. "They're bringing the troops ammunition," Gutstein said. Then he looked around with a satisfied smirk. "The best term for it is 'controlled chaos,'" he said. "It gets crazy. I love it. Grown men come out of here crying."

I first heard of the short-order cooks of Las Vegas nearly twenty years ago, when I was working at a breakfast place in Seattle called Julia's 14-Carat Café. By then, I'd cooked at a half-dozen restaurants and hamburger joints, and spent two months as the chef at a nursing home, making dishes like American Soufflé. (Take two loaves of white bread, slather each slice with oleo, douse with egg substitute, and bake.) But those were just summer jobs, for the most part. Julia's was full-time work, and it wasn't clear that I had anything better waiting for me. I'd been out of college for a year, and frying eggs had begun to seem suspiciously like a career choice.

The classic short-order career began in the Army or the Navy, where kids who had never cooked were suddenly ordered to feed thousands. The military taught speed, volume, sanitation, and the rudiments of American comfort food, and the best cooks carried their skills into civilian life. Well into the nineteen-fifties, short-order cooking was a huge, informal guild with its own peculiar Cockney ("dog soup" for water, "moo juice" for milk, "nervous pudding" for Jell-O, "zeppelins in a fog" for sausages and mashed potatoes). By the nineteen-seventies, though, the craft had seriously declined. Fast-food franchises had replaced most diners, and "point of sale" ticketing systems—in which servers send orders from terminals in the dining room straight to printers in the kitchen—had helped silence the old diner slang. What was once a skilled profession was now largely the province of part-timers and students on summer break.

Julia's was a throwback. A hippie coffee shop in the Moosewood mold, it made everything to order, from scratch: sour-dough pancakes, alfalfa-sprout omelettes, toast with the texture and density of prairie sod. If all those wheat berries had any fibrous benefits, they were more than offset by the pounds of butter and bacon fat we used, but people didn't seem to mind. The café was always full. A few local celebrities had made it their favorite hangout, including the cartoonist Gary Larson, who used to sit in the corner by the window while I made his breakfast. Julia's had a high ceiling, heavy wooden tables, and an open kitchen that jutted into the dining room so that customers could witness a cook's every oafish move. In the early weeks, I ruined several hundred eggs learning to crack them one-handed and flip them in the pan. I took comfort by imagining myself in future "Far Side" cartoons, having mordant exchanges with a chicken across the counter.

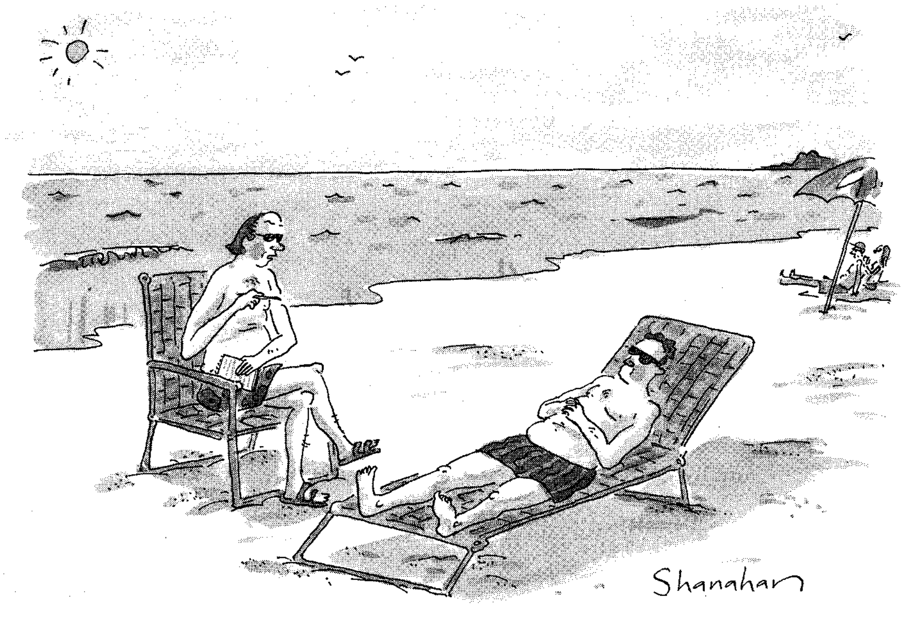
But mostly I just tried to keep up. The waiters scrawled out their orders in shorthand ("oe" for over easy, "sunny" for sunny-side up, "pot" for fried potatoes), clipped them on a revolving rack, and spun them around for the cooks to see on the other side of the serving counter. As business picked up, the wheel spun faster, till tickets filled its perimeter and began to double up. There were only two cooks per shift, and I once heard that we made an average of three hundred and fifty meals every morning, which seemed an astonishing number. Yet the other cooks never seemed fazed. They cracked eggs two at a time without breaking the yolks and kept four, five, or six pans going simultaneously. They moved with such unvarying precision that some suffered from repetitive-stress injuries. One of them, a scrawny black man who lived on a houseboat with his son, had developed a kind of tennis elbow from handling frying pans; another, whom I'll call Jack, had thrown out his hip after years of pivoting from the stove to the serving counter.

When I called Julia's recently—it's known simply as the 14-Carat Café now—the owner told me that she had fired Jack years ago. "He was a worthless human being," she said. "All he did was sit and eat coffee cake all day long." But he was the fastest cook I'd ever seen. Tall and paunchy, with stringy brown hair and a drooping mustache, he managed to look crisp and light on his feet in the kitchen. His cooking was a seamless sequence of interchangeable tasks, reduced to their essential motions: crack, flip, scoop, pour, crack, pour, flip, scoop. It reminded me of an athletic performance in its unhurried intensity, its reliance on muscle memory. It reminded me of my mother. She had gone to cooking school in Switzerland, but her true skill wasn't preparing gourmet recipes from a book; it was making the same beloved dishes—*Spätzle*, *Reisbrei*, *Bratkartoffeln*—perfectly every time. It was getting four or five of them hot to the table simultaneously, though they all required different cooking times, and doing so while phones rang and children squealed and pets wound their way between her feet.

I tried to explain this to Jack one morning, in somewhat less personal terms. We were leaning against the counter waiting for the place to open, watching the waitresses take chairs down from tables while customers gathered on the sidewalk outside. Before I could finish, he grunted and shook his head. "This is nothin'," he said. "You want to see the real masters, you've gotta go to Vegas."

The coffee shop at the Flamingo has been open day and night, weekends and holidays, for so long that its employees, like its customers, can't always tell the difference. "This is my Friday," a server will say on Monday, meaning that she has Tuesdays and Wednesdays off. The Tropical Breeze serves breakfast twenty-four hours a day and diner food with a trace of the islands—Caribbean pot stickers, Polynesian seafood salad. Its role at the Flamingo, like the Flamingo's role on the Strip, is to appeal to the common palate, to give comfort to the outpriced and overstimulated. "The more daring we get, the more complaints we get," Gutstein told me, pointing to a vat of shredded cabbage. "We went from coleslaw that was creamy to one that was tropical, with pineapple and vinegar. They can't stand this shit. So now we're going to go back to the old way. It's a blue-collar place, this coffee shop. We don't cater to these trendy customers."

By seven-thirty that morning, orders were coming in once a minute. There were five egg and grill cooks and twenty waiters for close to three hundred diners, and tables were turning over about every thirty-eight minutes. The breakfast rush had yet to begin. Gutstein stood in the center of the kitchen, across the serving counter from the cooks, banging covers on finished orders and stacking them five high for the waiters to carry off. He was still a little cranky from a Yankees loss the previous evening. "I did the numbers the other day, and I figured that for every pitch Randy Johnson throws he gets four thousand dollars," he was saying. "Could be a ball. Could be a strike. Could hit the batter. Four thousand dollars." He might have added that his cooks work more than six weeks to make that kind of



"How do you feel about turning over?"

money, but then the printer spooled out four new orders. He smacked his meaty hands together and grinned. "Let the games begin!"

Gutstein is the college boy who took a short-order job and never left. He is the one who, instead of feeling trapped by the grinding routine, found it liberating. "I never in a million years thought I would be doing this," he says. His father was a travelling salesman who studied trumpet at Juilliard; his mother was an office manager and a part-time caterer. In high school, he played defensive end on the football team and was good enough to earn a scholarship to Holy Cross. But he went to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst instead, played intramural basketball, and majored in political science, vaguely intending to become a lawyer. "I wasn't looking to do more work than I had to," he says. After graduation, he spent six months trying to launch a landscaping business, but customers were so scarce that he had to find other work in order to pay the rent. "So there was a job cooking kosher lunches at a yeshiva in Longmeadow, outside Springfield. Two hundred dollars a week. Next thing I knew, I was feeding a hundred and fifty little Jewish kids. That's when I caught the bug." The work was hot and fast and deafeningly loud, but the time went by like this, he says, snapping his fingers. "I just found myself."

Gutstein went on to apprentice at a French restaurant, starting out in the laundry and working his way up to chef de cuisine. After that, he took a series of jobs at larger and larger hotels in Hartford, Newark, and Los Angeles. By the time he came to Las Vegas, five years ago, he was married and had a six-month-old daughter, Hannah Brooklyn Gutstein. ("I went through all the other boroughs and none of them sounded right. Hannah Bronx, Hannah Yonkers . . .") He says that he couldn't get used to the newness of the place at first—the rectilinear streets and bulldozed desert plots; the jagged rim of mountains on the horizon. But real estate was cheap and the casinos needed chefs. So he bought a house in one of the stucco subdivisions south of town. Then he bought a newer, bigger house nearby and rented out the first. He had two more children, bought a charcoal-gray Mustang convertible, and slowly began to feel at home. "I was, like, 'Holy shit,'" he says. " 'You can make it in this town.'"

When Gutstein arrived at the Flamingo, in 2002, after two years as a chef at Bally's, Lindy's was still there, like a Vegas burlesque of a greasy spoon: the servers were mouthy and demanding, the kitchen cramped and grimy. "Dude, it was a fucking nightmare," Gutstein says. "I'm not kidding you. It was brutal. The cooks back there were losing their minds." Several years earlier, a section of the floor in the kitchen had collapsed when water from a broken pipe eroded the ground beneath it. The servers simply skirted the pit until someone laid down a piece of plywood to cover it. The plywood stayed there for months.

Gutstein spent his first few weeks walking around the hotel with a legal pad, just trying to grasp the scale of the place. The Flamingo has more than four thousand employees, eleven hundred of whom work in food service. Its ten restaurants and eleven bars cover every major theme in American dining—Chinese, Japanese, Italian, steak house, fast food, buffet—like a carpeted, air-conditioned version of a Midwestern downtown. The coffee shop's kitchen is half the length of a football field, and it's only the tail end of an intestinal tangle of prep kitchens, washrooms, and walk-in refrigerators that are shared by the restaurants and that coil around and beneath the casino. Go down one service corridor and you emerge in Pink Ginger, a pan-Asian restaurant that looks like the inside of a young girl's jewelry box. Go down another and you're in Margaritaville, where the booths are like fishing boats and a woman dressed in a mermaid suit slips down a water slide into a giant margarita blender.

Like the restaurants in the casino, the hotels on the Strip are just subsets of other corporate megastructures. The Flamingo used to belong to Caesars Entertainment, which also owned Caesars Palace, Paris Las Vegas, Bally's, and fourteen other properties. Then, this past June, Caesars Entertainment was bought by Harrah's Entertainment, which owned twenty-five casinos. For the Flamingo, all this merging and acquiring has meant, for instance, that the onion soup, turkey gravy, beef broth, marinara sauce, clam chowder, and chili served at the Tropical Breeze and its other restaurants are made in giant steam kettles at Paris Las Vegas, where they're pumped into two-gallon plastic tubes, loaded onto carts, and distributed around the Strip.

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The newest hotels are designed for such economies of scale. (The juice room at the Wynn squeezes ten kinds of fruit daily; its bakery makes sixty kinds of bread.) But the Flamingo was built in stages, like the Vatican. Its pink glass towers stand on the ruins of a low-slung nineteen-fifties pavilion with a neon column that bubbled like champagne. Beneath that lie the elegant remains of Bugsy Siegel's supper club and riding stables, from a time when horses could still be hitched in front of stores downtown. The result is a maze of ramps, stairs, and blind corridors that crisscross behind the hotel's sleek new interiors, like something from an etching by Escher. "This is why they implode hotels," a former head of food service at the hotel told me.

Two years ago, when the Flamingo began renovating Lindy's to make the Tropical Breeze, Gutstein helped redesign the kitchen. He gave it larger cooktops and better flow, revamped its inventory system, and reorganized the staff. To keep his part of the casino's vast mechanism in gear, he knew that he had to understand it in all its particulars. He had to know that the average meal takes five minutes to make and fifteen minutes to serve. He had to know how many pounds of corned beef, diced papaya, Cap'n Crunch, and kosher pickles the café consumes in a week, and how those numbers change if a convention or a sporting event is in town. (When NASCAR came to Vegas in March, sales of chicken-fried steak went "through the roof," Gutstein says.) And he had to extrapolate from those numbers how many cooks and servers he would need on any given shift. But what he needed most he already had: three good egg cooks.

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ZZZZZ
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Martin Nañez Moreno, the omelette man, grew up on a small farm in Villa Lopez, Mexico, six hours southeast of El Paso. He came to Las Vegas eleven years ago with his brother-in-law. His three older brothers are all cooks in Los Angeles. Joel Eckerson, the over-easy man, was reared in an orphanage outside Seoul, South Korea. He was adopted at the age of eleven by a Christian couple from Duanesburg, New York, and joined the Navy seven years later, where he first worked in a kitchen. When he arrived in Las Vegas, in 1985, he took a job as a cook's helper at the Flamingo and never left. Debbie Lubick makes all the poached-egg dishes at the Tropical Breeze. When she was growing up, her parents owned a fleet of eighty lunch trucks in Houston and San Antonio. Her father taught her to crack eggs one-handed when she was ten; by the time she was sixteen she was running the kitchen.

Standing shoulder to shoulder at the griddle that morning, they looked as oddly matched as three champions at a dog show, and just as self-possessed: Martin was dark and slender, with a debonair mustache; Joel was short, angular, and efficient; Debbie was tall and matronly, with a pale, sweet face edged with melancholy. Like almost everyone at the café, they'd come to Vegas from someplace else—I counted eleven Mexicans, three Salvadorans, five Filipinos, a Peruvian, an Iranian, a German, a Canadian, and an Englishman among the employees on one shift—but the egg cooks shared certain basic traits. They were all in their forties, all married with children, all deeply unexcitable souls at the heart of a hyperactive environment. They were the still center at the eye of the Tropical Breeze.

The Flamingo is a union house, like most of the large hotels in Vegas. Cooks start at about fifteen dollars an hour—servers make ten dollars, and generally collect another ten in tips—and work their way up the pay scale by seniority, from runner to cook's helper to fry cook to broiler cook to saucier to sous-chef to banquet cook. Martin and Joel were sauciers. They made a dollar an hour more than fry cooks, and had the privilege of working the day shift from six to two. (The swing shift was from two to ten, the graveyard shift from ten to six.) Debbie was just a fry cook, after nine years at the Flamingo, but even that made her a rarity in Vegas. Most women in casino restaurants get shunted into waitressing, hosting, or composing fruit and salad plates in the pantry. When they do make it to the line, they're not always welcome. "There are male egos involved," Debbie told me one day in the break room, with a tight smile. "The guys will die before they let me come over and help. They don't want to be shown up by a girl." That's fine with her, she said. "I have the easiest station on the line. Now I just tell them, 'You don't want the help? O.K., die.'"

The rush began at about ten o'clock. Or, rather, the first of a series of rushes: on weekends, customers come in waves, like Cossacks. When I arrived at the line, the heat seared my lungs—the griddle, at about six hundred degrees, was wreathed in steam from cooking pots and egg pans. Martin had ten omelettes on the griddle and was swigging something called SoBe Adrenaline Rush from a thin black can. Next to him, Joel had five pairs of eggs going and a hubcap-size pan of scrambled eggs. Debbie was fishing poached eggs from a roiling pot, while an assistant chef sliced red onions at a furious pace beside her, filling the air with a stinging mist.

"I need a four on two, sunny and scrambled, both wearing sausage!" a grill cook at the next station shouted. Joel nodded. The grill cooks usually made their own eggs to go with steaks or pancakes, but they sometimes needed help: "four on two" meant four eggs on two plates. Joel ripped a spool of new orders from the printer and tucked them under a clamp above the counter, then started cracking eggs into pans two at a time. When he was done, he had ten pairs of eggs cooking: five from previous orders, two from the grill cook's order, and three from the new orders. He finished the five original orders first. He put a pair of sunnys under a broiler and used his forefinger to break the yolks on a pair that had been ordered over hard. Then he flipped the eggs in that pan and those in three other pans that had been ordered over easy—one, two, three, four. He pivoted back to the counter, set five plates on it, and garnished them all with potatoes and bacon or sausage. He then flipped the over-hards and over-easies again, slid them onto their plates along with the sunnys from the broiler, and placed all the plates under the hot lights above the counter.

The whole sequence took about three minutes. Meanwhile, four new tickets had printed out, the potato bin needed refilling, the last five orders were ready to flip, and Debbie had asked for some over-easies to go with a chicken-fried steak. On Martin's side, the omelettes were multiplying—there were fifteen now, all with different ingredients—nearly crowding the egg pans off the griddle. He pivoted and flipped them in one motion, catching the omelettes in the pan as it reached the counter, ignoring a small commotion that had broken out over at the grill station.

"Would you eat that?" a barrel-chested black waitress named Rose was yelling. "Would you?" Apparently, she'd asked Frank—a hulking young grill cook who had been there for only five months—for an order of pancakes with a side of over-easies, but by the time the eggs were done the pancakes were cold. Frank had made a second batch, but Rose had left them sitting so long that they'd gone cold again. "You need some manners," Frank complained in a small voice, like a bike horn that had lost its squeak. Rose put her hand on her hip and cocked it to the side, then flung a flapjack across the counter as if it were a Frisbee. "I ain't servin' nothin' I wouldn't eat!"

Gutstein, being a cook, mostly blames the servers when things break down at the café, which they rarely do. "They aren't bad people, but their nature is 'I want, I want, I want,'" he says. "They get spoiled. They put in an order and want it within three or four minutes. So the cooks start sandbagging—preparing things ahead of time." He went over to quiet Rose down but soon gave up and wandered back to his station. "Why can't we be friends?" he sang in a gruff baritone. Behind him, a tall, buzz-cut waiter named Eric made a gesture as if bending a stick. "I can almost hear it snapping," he said. "It's bowed. It's not broken. But it's just about to snap."

Short-order cooking is like driving a car: anyone can do it up to a certain speed. The difference between an amateur and a crack professional isn't so much a matter of specific skills as of consistency and timing. Most diner kitchens are fairly forgiving places. You can break a yolk or two, lose track of an order, or overcook an omelette and start again without getting swamped. But as the pace increases those tolerances disappear. At the Tropical Breeze, a single mistake can throw an entire sequence out of kilter, so that every dish is either cold or overdone. A cook of robotic efficiency, moving steadily from task to task, suddenly slips a cog and becomes Lucy in the chocolate factory, stuffing candies into her mouth as they pile up on the assembly line.

On early mornings, well before the first rush, Gutstein would let me work at the over-easy station for an hour or two. After a few days, I could crack seven or eight eggs in a row without breaking a yolk—good enough for Julia's but not for a rush at the café. When Joel cracked eggs, his fingers were as loose and precise as a jazz guitarist's. He held one egg between his thumb and his first two fingers, another curled against his palm. He rapped the first egg on the rim of the pan, twisted it into hemispheres, and opened it as cleanly as if it were a Fabergé Easter egg. As the spent shell fell into the trash, he shuttled the second egg into position, as if pumping a rifle. He was proud of this little move. It saved him about a second versus having to grab an egg from the bin. If he cracked six thousand eggs a week, the move saved him about an hour; in a year, it saved him more than a week.

The egg flip had to be equally flawless but allowed for more personal flair. I often wished that I had a slow-motion film of the different cooks doing it. Edgar Lopez, the sassy Salvadoran who filled in for those on break, liked to throw his eggs high into the air, like salsa dancers, catch them at the top of their arc, and let them slide vertically down the pan. Joel gave his eggs a quick little jerk, so that they stood up on edge and swung over like a door on a hinge. Martin barely moved his pan at all. His eggs just seemed to roll over on command. As for mine, they'd catapult up and turn an eager circle in the air, but every fourth or fifth pair would belly flop in the pan and spring a leak.

"The hard part isn't flipping them," Debbie said. "It's catching them." But cooking a dozen egg dishes at once, while filling supplies and fielding side orders, is above all a feat of timing. Even if your technique is perfect, everything in the kitchen conspires to throw you off. The customer wants crispy bacon, so you have to root around in a warming tray or toss some slices into the deep fryer. The trash hasn't been taken out, so you have to dump your shells at the next station. A batch of eggs have been stored so long that their yolks are weak and more likely to burst. To keep track of every dish, you need a dozen egg timers in your head, all set to trigger alarms at different intervals.

Warren Meck, a neuroscientist at Duke University, has identified the neural circuitry that allows the brain to time several events at once. As it happens, short-order cooks are among his favorite examples. They're like jugglers, he says, who can keep a dozen balls in the air at the same time. He calls them "the master interval timers."

Whenever a cook sets a pan on a griddle, Meck says, a burst of dopamine is released in the brain's frontal cortex. The cortex is full of oscillatory neurons that vibrate at different tempos. The dopamine forces a group of these neurons to fall into synch, which sends a chemical signal to the corpus striatum, at the base of the brain. "We call that the start gun," Meck says. The striatum recognizes the signal as a time marker and releases a second burst of dopamine, which sends a signal back to the frontal cortex via the thalamus—the stop gun. Every time this neural circuit is completed, the brain gets better at distinguishing that particular interval from the thousands of others that it times during the course of the day. An experienced cook like Joel, Meck believes, will have a separate neural circuit set up for every task: an over-easy circuit, an over-medium circuit, a sunny-side-up circuit, and so on, each one reinforced through constant, repetitive use.

Meck has yet to put a short-order cook in a brain scanner, as he has done with musicians, but he suspects that the results would be similar: their oscillatory neurons will have grown far more synapses than those in the average person's brain. If they are asked to time certain events, more of their brain will light up. His description reminded me of something that Michael Stern, the co-author of "Roadfood," had told me about one of his favorite short-order cooks: "It's like part of his brain is developed that I don't even have."

The servers at the Tropical Breeze like to say that they have the busiest coffee shop in the world, or at least that's how it feels. Customers sometimes ask them if they actually live in Las Vegas, as

TABOOS

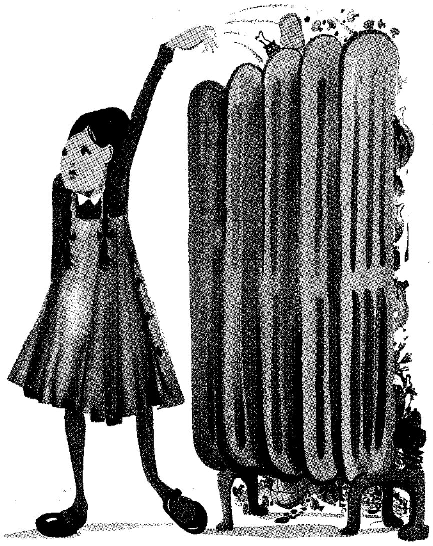
CAVIAR

When I was growing up in Moscow, in the late sixties, my mother and I lived on the paltry sixty rubles a month she earned from teaching English in night school. Mother was a product of Khrushchev's Thaw Generation, and her relationship with her fiercely Communist father was often explosive. He had served as Stalin's chief of naval intelligence in the Baltic during the Great Patriotic War; to ask him for any favors involving his Party *blat*, or connections, violated Mother's principles. Our situation, however, was desperate. At my neighborhood kindergarten, children were falling ill from the spoiled meat in the borscht. And Mother had overheard my teacher discussing how to combat swelling class sizes: "Open the windows—wide." (It was fifteen below, and gusting.) Granddad offered his *blat*, Mother relented, and the next day I was enrolled at the kindergarten for offspring of the Central Committee—a school where children boarded during the week, going home only on weekends.

Mother was relieved that I would be spared pneumonia and dysentery, but she was appalled at the idea of exposing me to the coddled nomenklatura children. Most Soviets spent half their lives queuing up for tinned sprats. *They* drove in black Volgas to "closed supply depots," unmarked warehouses that dispensed sevruga and sturgeon and instant coffee, that most elusive of luxuries. Or, at least, that's what we imagined. "Keep quiet about the food at the kindergarten," Mother admonished as we trudged through the snow. To Mother and her dissident friends, partaking in such delicacies suggested complicity.

The Central Committee kindergarten, neat and stuccoed, sat behind a ten-foot wire fence in a pine forest. Inside the school, everything reeked of prosperity and just-baked piroshki. On a panoramic veranda, Party children were sleeping alfresco, bundled in goose-down sleeping bags. I had arrived during "dead hour," Soviet for afternoon nap.

"Fish-fat time!" the teacher announced when her charges awakened. I thought she meant fish oil, which was administered daily at all kindergartens. Instead, I was approached by an elephantine nanny with a heaping spoonful of black caviar. It was my first encounter with sevruga eggs. They smelled metallic, like a rusty doorknob.



RUBEN TOLEDO

"Open wide . . . a spoonful, for Lenin," the nanny implored. "For Motherland, for the Party!" she said, pushing the caviar toward my locked lips. I started to gag.

"Don't you dare throw up!" she bellowed. "Or I'll make you eat every drop of your puke!"

My alienation intensified with every meal: veal scallops, poached sturgeon—this food, I knew, would horrify Mother. Then, one day, an idea came to me. Next to my table in the dining room was a radiator, and between the radiator and the wall was a small gap. This became my furtive dumping ground. First, I disposed of a rosy pork chop with porcini mushrooms; then macaroni, which, unlike the coarse pasta we ate at home, was fine and white and gooey with imported cheese; then cod-liver pâté and a farmer's-cheese pudding with lingonberry sauce. There was one thing I couldn't bring myself to toss—the sweets that were served with afternoon tea. Smartly wrapped in heavy matte paper, they were probably manufactured by the Red October candy factory exclusively for the nomenklatura. They seemed dense with power and prestige. I stashed them in my laundry bag.

In a few days, the dining room began to smell. When my decomposing pile was discovered, Mother was summoned to the office of the director, a small, sniffling woman with the colorless Slavic features of a career apparatchik. "Your child, Comrade Frumkina, doesn't really belong to our *kollektiv*," the director said, enunciating Mother's Jewish surname with a sneer. Was I being expelled from the Central Committee kindergarten? Was Mother going to lose her job—or worse? In a panic, I rushed to the dormitory and grabbed my laundry bag.

Mother took me home on a sled, yanking it over the snowy slopes with uncharacteristic aggression. I pulled a candy called *ananas* out of my bag and sucked on the chocolate shell, slowly working toward the exotic pineapple-flavored filling. It was the best thing I'd ever tasted. To mollify Mother, I gave her a piece, thinking she would topple into the snow, paralyzed with ecstasy and guilt. But she absent-mindedly chewed and kept pulling the sled. The next Monday, I was back at the kindergarten, eating caviar behind the tall wire fence.

—Anya von Bremzen

if no one could really stand this pace or life style for long. "You can't raise children here, can you?" they say. But the truth is, if everyone seems to come to Vegas from someplace else, no one ever seems to leave. The average length of employment among the workers I polled was a little more than ten years, and Clara, who made salads and fruit plates, had been there for thirty-six. "Sometimes it feels like it's the only coffee shop in the world," Inge, a seventy-three-year-old hostess from Berlin, told me.

We were sitting in Bugsy's Backroom, the Flamingo's employee cafeteria, deep in the netherworld backstage of the casino. Steve, a former high-school social-studies teacher, who turned fifty-eight this year, stubbed out his cigarette and nodded. "They say that if you can work here as a server you can work anywhere," he told me. "None of us have easy jobs." He jerked his thumb at Patty, the brassy buffet hostess beside him, who had dyed-blond hair and heavy-lidded eyes. "I mean, she's only twenty-six, and look at her."

Patty broke into a loud, throaty laugh. "And I just had a face-lift," she said. She pointed to her powdered cheek. "This is my ass."

All around us, groups of other casino workers were hunched over Formica tables in their gaudy uniforms, picking at food or watching TV on overhead monitors. There were craps dealers with gold shirts and flaming-sunset collars and cuffs; middle-aged cocktail waitresses wearing coat dresses with plunging necklines; gangs of scruffy young waiters from Margaritaville in Hawaiian shirts. In the far corner, under the cool fluorescent lights, a quartet of blackjack dealers with slicked-back hair were playing cards with a distracted air. "It has been ___ days since our last worker's compensation accident," a sign near the entrance read. "When we reach ___ days accident free there will be a reward."

Why do they all stay? I wondered. What keeps them here, of all places? For most, the answer seemed to lie in the union buttons on their shirts. Las Vegas is a city where a waiter can still spend his whole career in one restaurant without being laid off or relocated. The casinos, for better or worse, are stuck in the desert with their employees. They can't outsource their jobs to Bangalore. They can't drum up an army of minimum-wage replacements overnight. So they pay a living wage, provide health insurance and pensions, and give their employees a certain leeway. Not long ago, a couple of workers told me, a Flamingo employee stabbed another worker with a ballpoint pen. She's still working at the hotel.

"You have to fire yourself, just about," Patty said. "It's a trap, but it's a good trap. For those of us getting older—I'm really fifty-seven—it's a godsend."

Still, that didn't quite explain why the egg cooks stuck around. Joel had worked at the Flamingo for nineteen years, Martin for eleven. They were the fastest cooks that most of the café's servers had ever seen—"It just shocks me, what those guys do," one waitress told me. "My husband's a cook, and they just run circles around him." As sauciers in the union hierarchy, they could easily have shopped their skills around: Las Vegas has become a city enamored of fine dining. The new Wynn hotel alone has twenty-two food and drink outlets, ten of them run by three- and four-star chefs. Why were Joel and Martin still cooking eggs?

HURT HOSPITAL'S BEST SUICIDE JOKES

In unfolded aluminum chairs the color of shit
and set in a circle as if to corral some emptiness
in this church basement deep in the dirt,
strangers sit and tell stories.
Sergei sipped wine in a hot tub. Janice
threw back shots in a dive.
Bob drew blinds to smoke blunts and ate nothing
but cake frosting bought by the case.
The first lady of someplace swiped her son's meds
to stay slim. Craig burst through bank doors,
machine gun in hand. John geezed heroin:
with a turkey baster, he says, *into a neck vein.*
A cop shoved Mark's face in the mud,
put a shoe on his neck to cuff him and ask
where his friends were. *I had friends*,
he said, *think I'd be here*?
Zola once wrote that the road from the shrine
at Lourdes was impressively littered
with crutches and canes but he noted
not one wooden leg.
In the garage, with your face through a noose,
you kick out the ladder, but the green rope won't give,
and when your wife clicks the garage switch and the door
tilts up, there you dangle on tiptoe.
Alive, all of us, on this island, where we sip only
black liquids or clear water and face down the void
we've shaped, and should our eyes meet
what howls erupt—like jackals we bawl
to find ourselves upright.

—*Mary Karr*

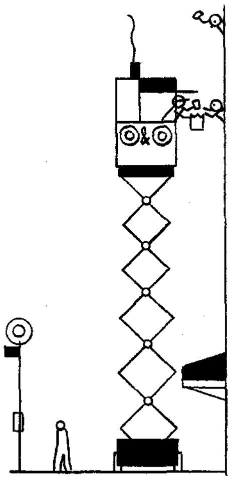
One evening, a few hours after the café's breakfast crew had gone home, I walked up the Strip to Corsa Cucina, one of the Wynn's flagship restaurants, to see how the other half cooked. Stephen Kalt, the restaurant's executive chef, is a burly forty-nine-year-old with a bald pate and a lively, incisive mind. With his sleeves rolled up and his apron on, he looks like an Italian butcher but talks like an epicure—a perfect fit for the new Vegas. Before apprenticing at Le Cirque, in New York, and training with such culinary stars as Thomas Keller and Wolfgang Puck, Kalt owned a couple of pizza parlors in Tennessee with his younger brother. Watching him work is like seeing short-order set to opera.

The dining room at Corsa Cucina is long and dimly lit, with red leather banquettes and an open kitchen along one wall, like a lavishly appointed diner. Kalt stands at the center of the serving counter, facing an enormous red-tiled oven, in a circle of light cast by four pendant warming lamps. With his back to the dining room and his eyes fixed on a row of tickets on the counter, he cues his cooks one by one, as if conducting musicians from a score. "Fire one lamb, a halibut, and a tuna," he'll say. "And give me a side of spinach, a side of whipped." The food that emerges a little later shares Kalt's robust sophistication, a world away from fried eggs: lamb-shank tagine, poached halibut with buttered cockles, seared tuna with prosciutto-wrapped figs. To make sure the meal is perfectly paced and presented, Kalt sends runners out to spy on diners and inspects every dish as it goes out, wiping away stray flecks of sauce or butter. "The finer the dining, the more constraint there is," he says. "If one of these guys smacks a plate down too hard, I'll tell him, 'You can't do that.'"

And yet, from a cook's perspective, the difference between Corsa and the Tropical Breeze is largely a matter of ingredients. Many of the dishes are grilled, deep-fried, or sautéed, just as they are at the café. Most are assembled quickly out of previously prepared elements. Instead of bins of shredded cheese, chopped ham, and bacon, Kalt's cooks have bins of black-truffle butter, olive confit, and salt-cod brandade. Instead of tubs of sausage gravy and refried beans, they have squirt bottles of tamarind-honey sauce and Thai-basil puree. The cooks at Corsa have to execute a few recipes flawlessly. They have to know how to build a veal sauce and how to keep a beurre blanc from breaking. But they rarely make more than three dishes at once. The real feats of timing—coördinating multiple courses, sequencing orders so they're done simultaneously—are all left to Kalt.

"If I was recruiting, those guys who can handle fifteen pans, that's who I'd want," Elizabeth Blau, a restaurant consultant and one of the impresarios behind the gourmet movement in Las Vegas, told me. "Forget French culinary technique. It's not rocket science. Whether it's cooking an omelette or cooking a beautiful piece of fish, it's about precision. They can do the job." Still, few of the cooks at Corsa came from short-order kitchens. Many were young, white, and male. Some had gone to culinary school; others were "homegrown," as Kalt put it; most probably wouldn't stay for more than a couple of years. They'd grow bored with cooking the same dishes and move on to the next restaurant, the next chef, hoping to run their own kitchen one day.

I asked Kalt what separated them from the short-order cooks at the Flamingo. "That's a different animal," he said. "That is a guy who grew up seventeen generations on a farm in Mexico. He isn't raised, like us, to think that he's going to be the President of the country. He's raised to think about his next meal." He shook his head. "Look, I've had guys from a little farm in Pueblo who were some of the best chefs I've ever seen. Phenomenal. Anything you taught them they could learn, and do. And yet they were happy where they were. They didn't need to be striving for the next thing. I can get a guy like that to make the same chopped salad for me the same way for ten years. Never been happier. Because that's the culture, that's the rhythm—you put seeds in the ground year after year. You get an American kid, he would jump off a building already."



It's easier to turn a short-order cook into a chef than it is to turn a chef into a short-order cook, Kalt said. I wasn't so sure. The cooks at the Tropical Breeze didn't seem resigned to their jobs so much as addicted to them. Joel had been offered higher pay for easier work at one of the Flamingo's gourmet restaurants, yet he'd stuck with the eggs. "I like it fast-paced, boom, boom, boom," Joel said. "You don't get bored." After a few years at the café, kitchens like Corsa Cucina seem to move at quarter-speed. On the Saturday night that I was there, Kalt's nine cooks prepared about four hundred meals. That same day, Joel and Martin alone made eleven hundred.

"I've tried to promote Joel," Gutstein told me one night at his house, over some crab cakes he'd made. "I've given him the opportunity to be a manager, to get out of that bullshit five-hundred-degree heat for eight hours. I'm, like, 'Come on, Joel, you're better than that!' But he doesn't want it. Straight up? He's in such a comfort zone that it's hurting him." Yet Gutstein wasn't so different. When I asked if he would ever work at Pink Ginger, the Flamingo's Asian restaurant, his shoulders shook as if a spider had scurried down them. "I wouldn't be able to stand it," he said.

If someone gave Gutstein a million dollars tomorrow, he'd probably quit the Tropical Breeze and open a bed-and-breakfast—"Like Martha Stewart," he said. "Real homey." But, in the meantime, he knew better than to doubt his good fortune. Growing up in Yonkers, he used to watch his father change jobs every few years. "I love my dad, but nothing was ever good enough for him," he said. "And he's still busting his ass. I think he's selling those life-alert systems now. Before that it was Craftmatic adjustable beds, before that window-shade treatments, before that light bulbs. He changes jobs like I change underwear." Now that Gutstein has a family of his own, he has vowed to stick to what he knows. "Because of the way my dad was, I'm pretty much Steady Eddie."

As he talked, there was a scuffling sound at the front door and three children came tumbling through, hot and sandy from an excursion to Lake Mead, the vast reservoir behind the Hoover Dam, half an hour from Vegas. When Hannah Brooklyn Gutstein saw her father, she ran across the room and into his lap, dropping her towel along the way. She was as round and red-faced and freckled as her father—baked pink by the desert, as he had been by the kitchen. He handed her a crab cake. "We're doing good," he said. "We work hard, but we're very lucky. I'm not after the golden egg." ♦

CHEZ ADDAMS

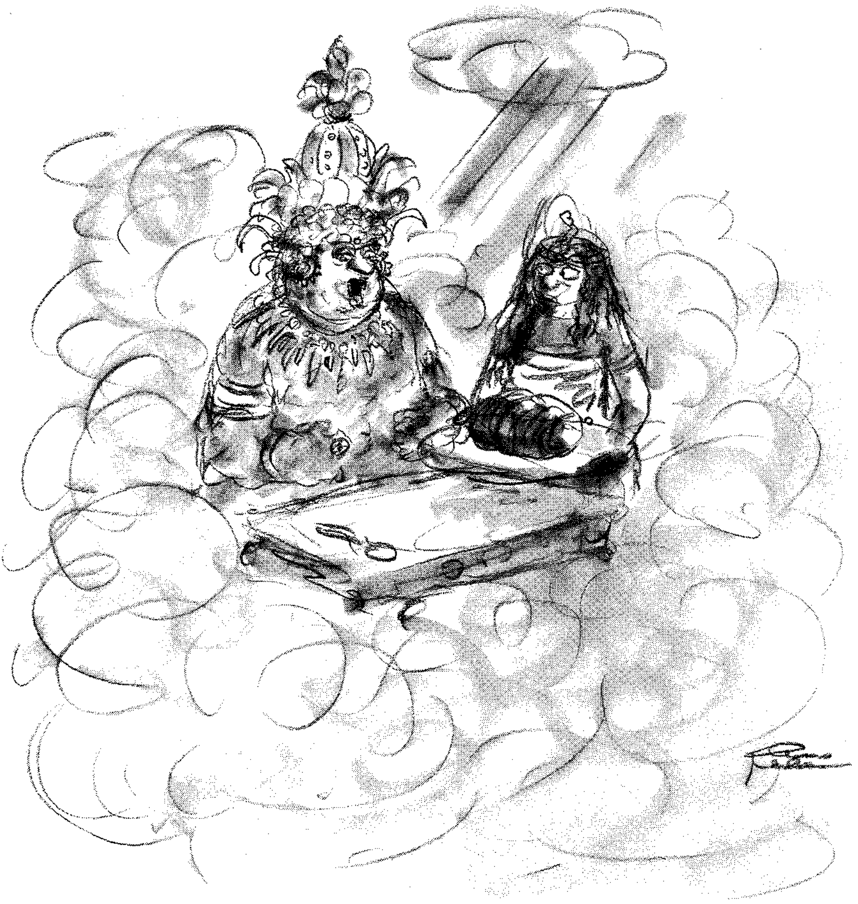
Charles Addams was my first cartoon love. His dark yet strangely jolly view of life jumped out at me from the pages of my parents' *New Yorkers*, and when I discovered his books in the library—"Monster Rally," "Addams and Evil," "Drawn & Quartered," to name a few—I knew that I had found a kindred spirit. If you were a kid who preferred reading about cases of spontaneous combustion or studying photographs of people with bizarre medical conditions to going outside and "playing," perhaps you felt that way, too.

Humor often doesn't last from one season to the next, but Addams's cartoons are timeless. If there ever comes a day when one of his best-known illustrations—in which the Addams Family, standing on the roof of their house, pours a cauldron of boiling oil on the wholesome carolers below—is no longer funny, I don't want to know about it.

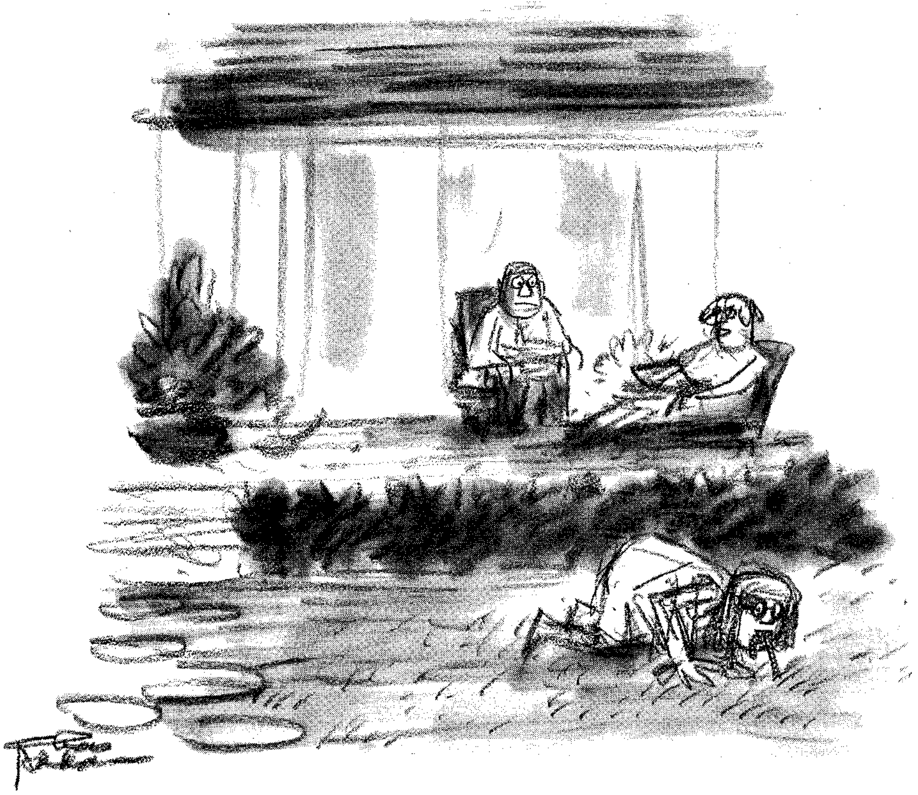
The cartoons on these pages, all previously unpublished, are sketches, without the lovingly rendered, lush gray-and-black washes, more vivid than most color renderings, that we associate with Addams's work. But they offer an intimate look at how he made decisions about line, form, and composition, and they feel alive, full of the artist's energy and thought.

Here the subject is eating, a topic that nowadays is treated with either fetishistic reverence ("The transcendent blue cheese dissolved in my mouth like a heavenly morsel") or puritanical food panic ("This blue cheese contains seventy-two thousand grams of fat!"). Addams wisely has nothing to do with either of these camps. In his hands, ingestion, one of the most ordinary human activities, becomes delightfully macabre.

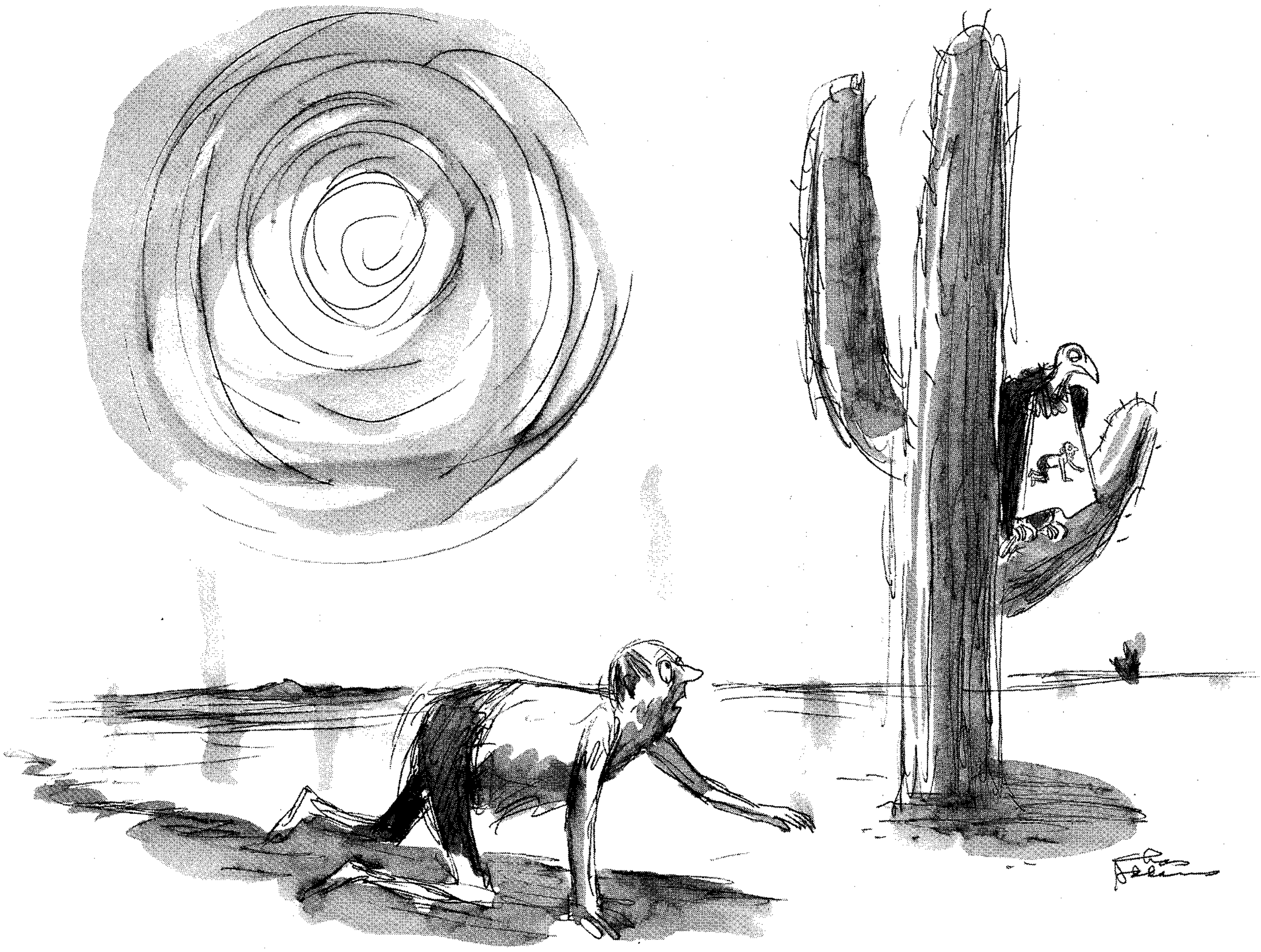
—*Roz Chast*

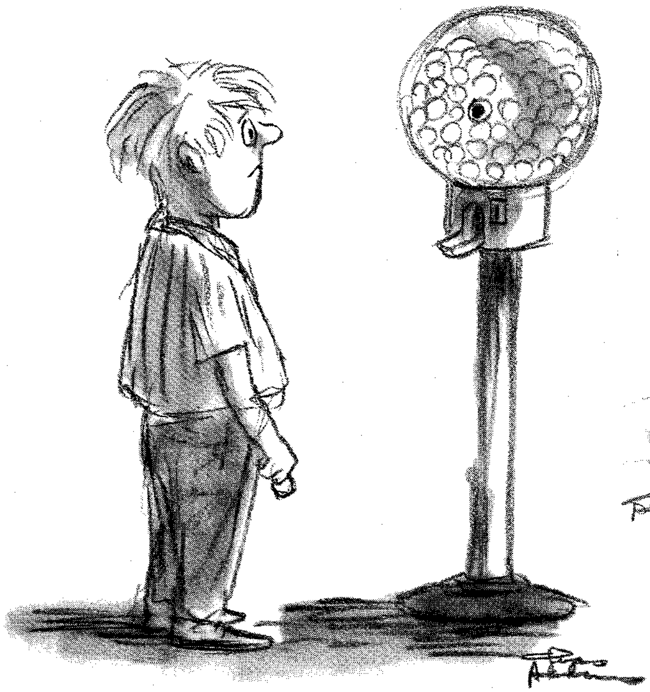


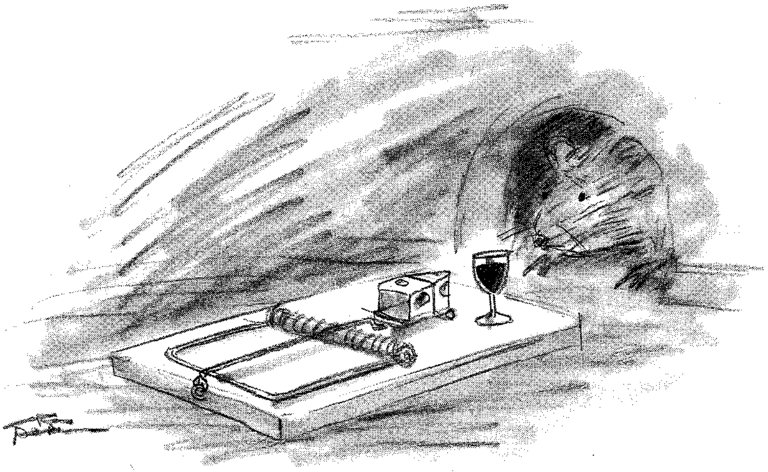
"Not sacrificial lamb again!"

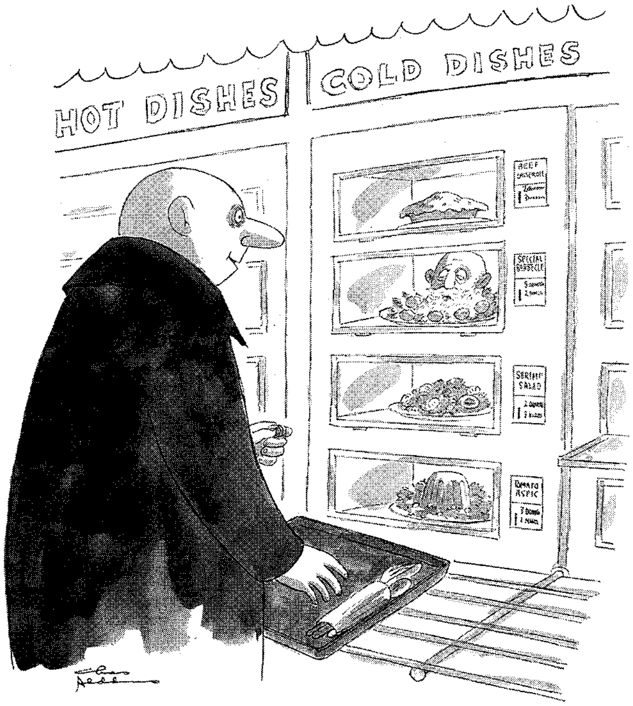


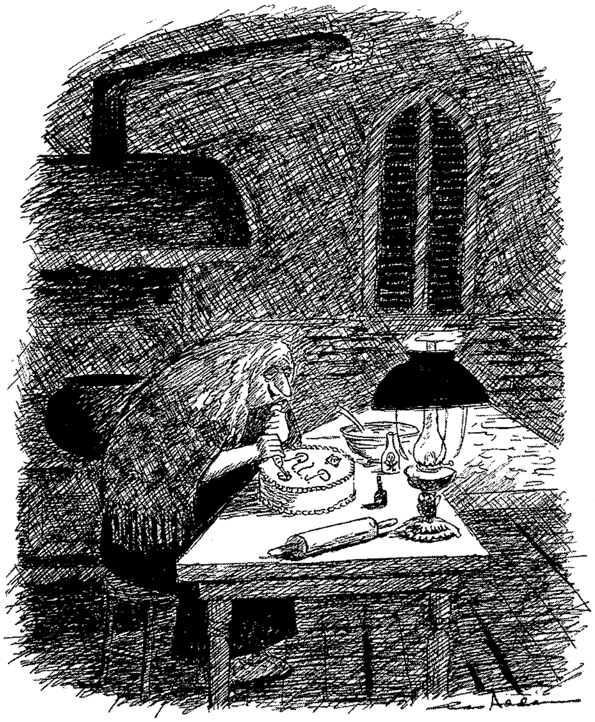
"I'm worried about Annette. She eats like a bird."

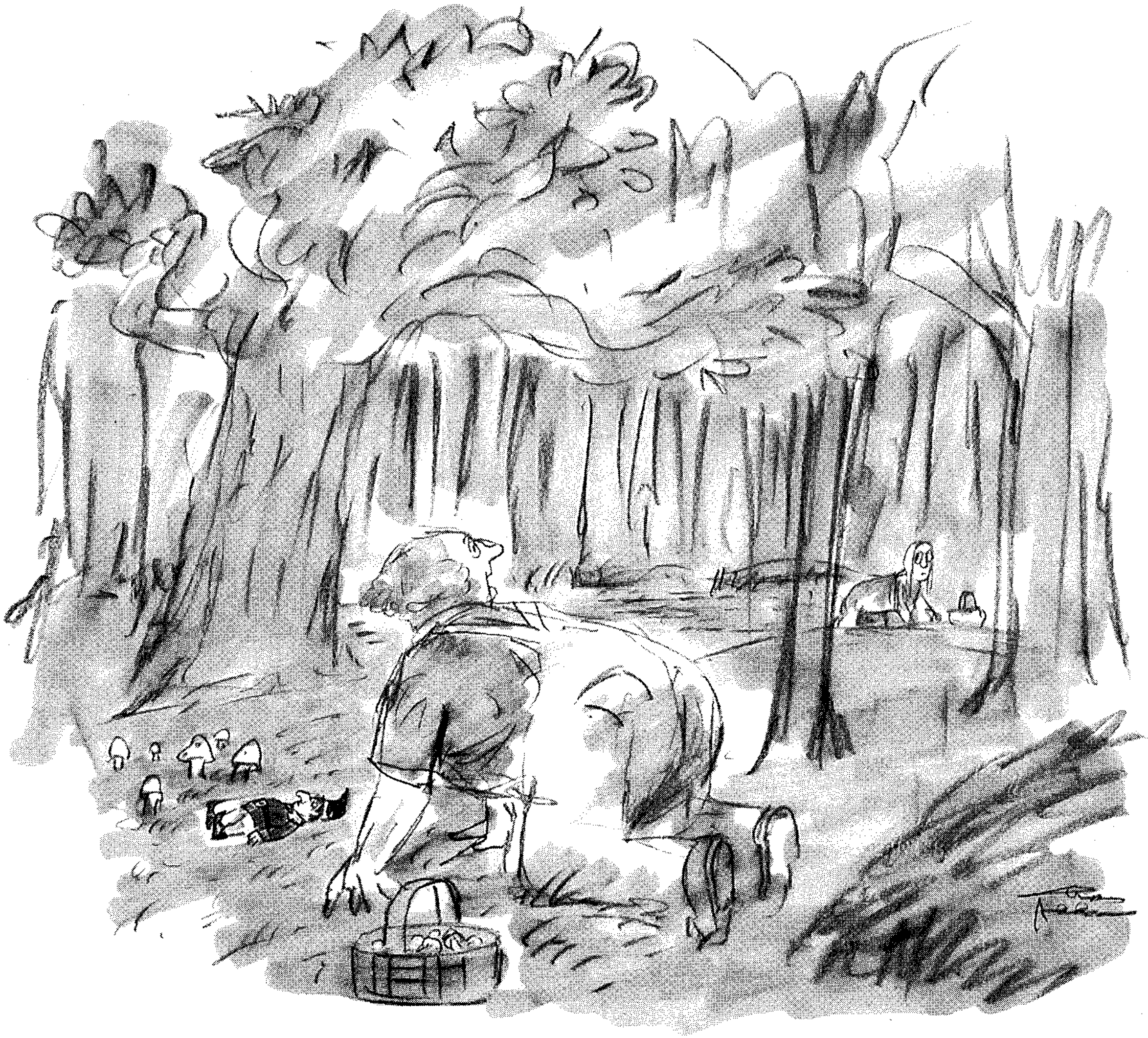




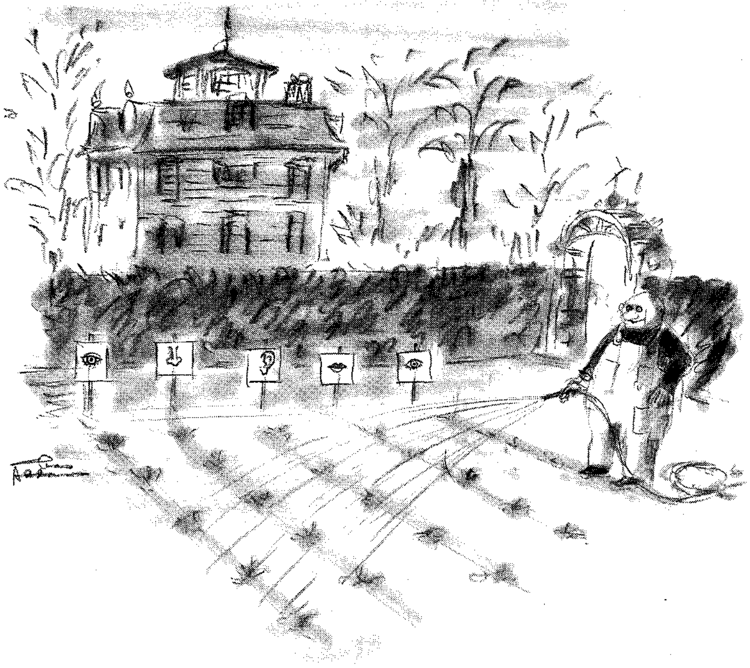


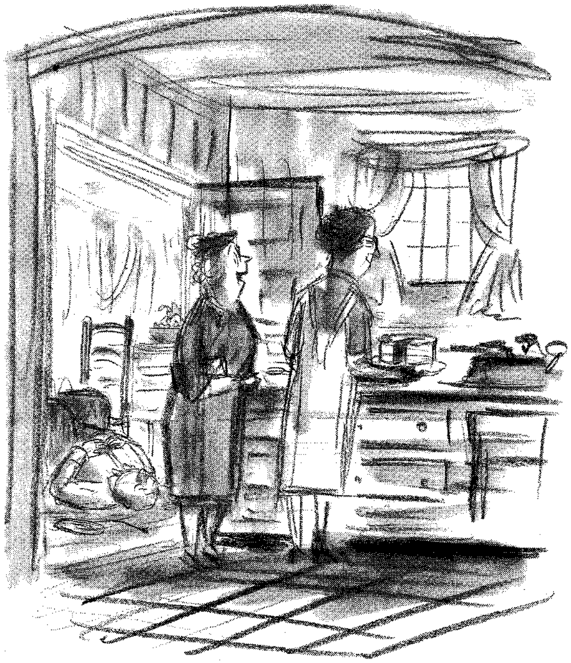

HOT DISHES
COLD DISHES
BEEF CASSEROLE
SPECIAL BARBECUE
SHRIMP SALAD
TOMATO ASPIC



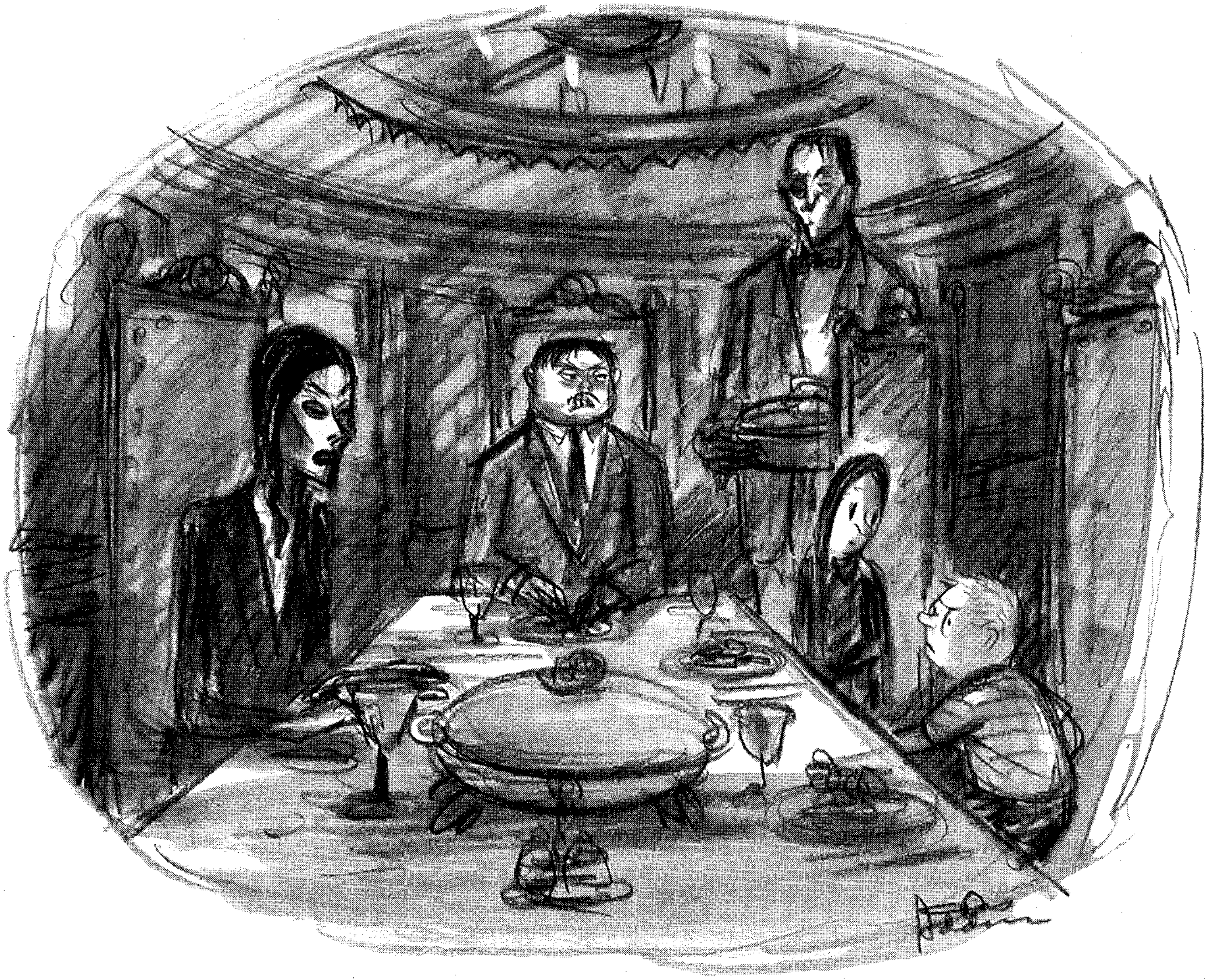


"Hey, Lois, I think you better hold off on the mushrooms."





“Hilda, you’ve got to give me your recipe.”



“I’ve told you a hundred times. Don’t feed Grandma at the table.”

COURTESY TEE & CHARLES ADDAMS FOUNDATION

HANS GISSINGER

To explore alternative ways of inventing new products, Project Delta assembled three teams—each representing a different metho

ANNALS OF TECHNOLOGY

THE BAKEOFF

Competing to create the ultimate cookie.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

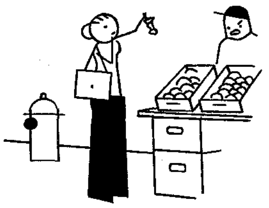
ovation—and had some of the foremost talents in the food industry go head to head.

Steve Gundrum launched Project Delta at a small dinner last fall at Il Fornaio, in Burlingame, just down the road from the San Francisco Airport. It wasn't the first time he'd been to Il Fornaio, and he made his selection quickly, with just a glance at the menu; he is the sort of person who might have thought about his choice in advance—maybe even that morning, while shaving. He would have posed it to himself as a question—Ravioli alla Lucana?—and turned it over in his mind, assembling and disassembling the dish, ingredient by ingredient, as if it were a model airplane. Did the Pecorino pepato really belong? What if you dropped the basil? What would the ravioli taste like if you froze it, along with the ricotta and the Parmesan, and tried to sell it in the supermarket? And then what would you do about the fennel?

Gundrum is short and round. He has dark hair and a mustache and speaks with the flattened vowels of the upper Midwest. He is voluble and excitable and doggedly unpretentious, to the point that your best chance of seeing him in a suit is probably Halloween. He runs Mattson, one of the country's foremost food research-and-development firms, which is situated in a low-slung concrete-and-glass building in a nondescript office park in Silicon Valley. Gundrum's office is a spare, windowless room near the rear, and all day long white-coated technicians come to him with prototypes in little bowls, or on skewers, or in Tupperware containers. His job is to taste and advise, and the most common words out of his mouth are "I have an idea." Just that afternoon, Gundrum had ruled on the reformulation of a popular spinach dip (which had an unfortunate tendency to smell like lawn clippings) and examined the latest iteration of a low-carb kettle corn for evidence of rhythmic munching (the metronomic hand-to-mouth cycle that lies at the heart of any successful snack experience). Mattson created the shelf-stable Mrs. Fields Chocolate Chip Cookie, the new Boca Burger products for Kraft Foods, Orville Redenbacher's Butter Toffee Popcorn Clusters, and so many other products that it is impossible to walk down the aisle of a supermarket and not be surrounded by evidence of the company's handiwork.

That evening, Gundrum had invited two of his senior colleagues at Mattson—Samson Hsia and Carol Borba—to dinner, along with Steven Addis, who runs a prominent branding firm in the Bay Area. They sat around an oblong table off to one side of the dining room, with the sun streaming in the window, and Gundrum informed them that he intended to reinvent the cookie, to make something both nutritious and as "indulgent" as the premium cookies on the supermarket shelf. "We want to delight people," he said. "We don't want some ultra-high-nutrition power bar, where you have to rationalize your consumption." He said it again: "We want to delight people."

As everyone at the table knew, a healthful, good-tasting cookie is something of a contradiction. A cookie represents the combination of three unhealthful ingredients—sugar, white flour, and shortening. The sugar adds sweetness, bulk, and texture: along with baking powder, it produces the tiny cell structures that make baked goods light and fluffy. The fat helps carry the flavor. If you want a big hit of vanilla, or that chocolate taste that really blooms in the nasal cavities, you need fat. It also keeps the strands of gluten in the flour from getting too tightly bound together, so that the cookie stays chewable. The flour, of course, gives the batter its structure, and, with the sugar, provides the base for the browning reaction that occurs during baking. You could replace the standard white flour with wheat flour, which is higher in fibre, but fibre adds grittiness. Over the years, there have been many attempts to resolve these contradictions—from Snackwells and diet Oreos to the dry, grainy hockey pucks that pass for cookies in health-food stores—but in every case flavor or fluffiness or tenderness has been compromised. Steve Gundrum was undeterred. He told his colleagues that he wanted Project Delta to create the world's greatest cookie. He wanted to do it in six months. He wanted to enlist the biggest players in the American food industry. And how would he come up with this wonder cookie? The old-fashioned way. He wanted to hold a bakeoff.



The standard protocol for inventing something in the food industry is called the matrix model. There is a department for product development, which comes up with a new idea, and a department for process development, which figures out how to realize it, and then, down the line, departments for packing, quality assurance, regulatory affairs, chemistry, microbiology, and so on. In a conventional bakeoff, Gundrum would have pitted three identical matrixes against one another and compared the results. But he wasn't satisfied with the unexamined assumption behind the conventional bakeoff—that there was just one way of inventing something new.

Gundrum had a particular interest, as it happened, in software. He had read widely about it, and once, when he ran into Steve Jobs at an Apple store in the Valley, chatted with him for forty-five minutes on technical matters relating to the Apple operating system. He saw little difference between what he did for a living and what the software engineers in the surrounding hills of Silicon Valley did. "Lines of code are no different from a recipe," he explains. "It's the same thing. You add a little salt, and it tastes better. You write a little piece of code, and it makes the software work faster." But in the software world, Gundrum knew, there were ongoing debates about the best way to come up with new code.

On the one hand, there was the "open source" movement. Its patron saint was Linus Torvald, the Norwegian hacker who decided to build a free version of Unix, the hugely complicated operating system that runs many of the world's large computers. Torvald created the basic implementation of his version, which he called Linux, posted it online, and invited people to contribute to its development. Over the years, thousands of programmers had helped, and Linux was now considered as good as proprietary versions of Unix. "Given enough eyeballs all bugs are shallow" was the Linux mantra: a thousand people working for an hour each can do a better job writing and fixing code than a single person working for a thousand hours, because the chances are that among those thousand people you can find precisely the right expert for every problem that comes up.

On the other hand, there was the "extreme programming" movement, known as XP, which was led by a legendary programmer named Kent Beck. He called for breaking a problem into the smallest possible increments, and proceeding as simply and modestly as possible. He thought that programmers should work in pairs, two to a computer, passing the keyboard back and forth. Between Beck and Torvald were countless other people, arguing for slightly different variations. But everyone in the software world agreed that trying to get people to be as creative as possible was, as often as not, a *social* problem: it depended not just on who was on the team but on how the team was organized.

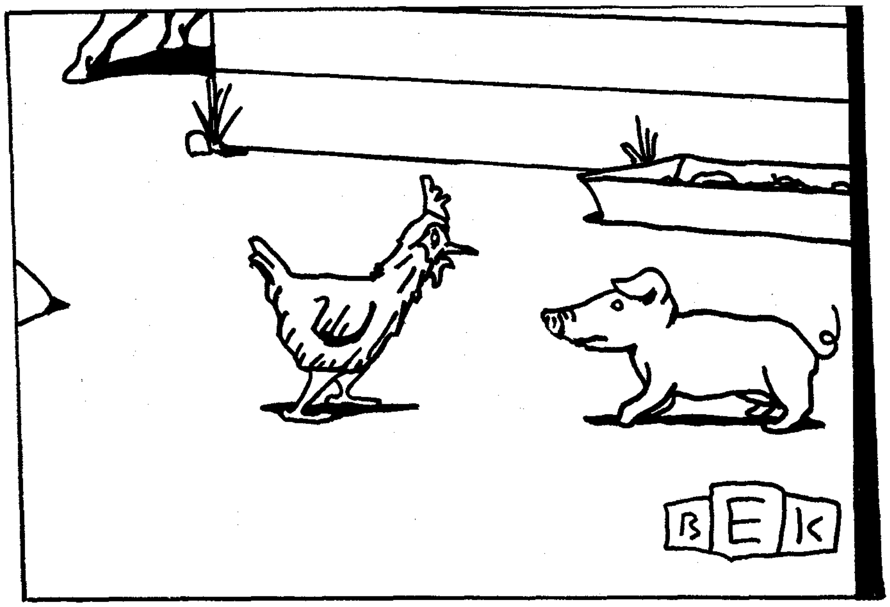
"I remember once I was working with a printing company in Chicago," Beck says. "The people there were having a terrible problem with their technology. I got there, and I saw that the senior people had these corner offices, and they were working separately and doing things separately that they had trouble integrating later on. So I said, 'Find a space where you can work together.' So they found a corner of the machine room. It was a raised floor, ice cold. They just loved it. They would go there five hours a day, making lots of progress. I flew home. They hired me for my technical expertise. And I told them to rearrange the office furniture, and that was the most valuable thing I could offer them."

It seemed to Gundrum that people in the food world had a great deal to learn from all this. They had become adept at solving what he called "science projects"—problems that required straightforward, linear applications of expensive German machinery and armies of white-coated people with advanced degrees in engineering. Cool Whip was a good example: a product processed so exquisitely—with air bubbles of such fantastic uniformity and stability—that it remains structurally sound for months, at high elevation and at low elevation, frozen and thawed and then refrozen. But coming up with a healthy cookie, which required finessing the inherent contradictions posed by sugar, flour, and shortening, was the kind of problem that the food industry had more trouble with. Gundrum recalled one brainstorming session that a client of his, a major food company, had convened. "This is no joke," he said. "They played a tape where it sounded like the wind was blowing and the birds were chirping. And they posed us out on a dance floor, and we had to hold our arms out like we were trees and close our eyes, and the ideas were supposed to grow like fruits off the limbs of the trees. Next to me was the head of R. & D., and he looked at me and said, 'What the hell are we doing here?'"

For Project Delta, Gundrum decreed that there would be three teams, each representing a different methodology of invention. He had read Kent Beck's writings, and decided that the first would be the XP team. He enlisted two of Mattson's brightest young associates—Peter Dea and Dan Howell. Dea is a food scientist, who worked as a confectionist before coming to Mattson. He is tall and spare, with short dark hair. "Peter is really good at hitting the high note," Gundrum said. "If a product needs to have a particular flavor profile, he's really good at getting that one dimension and getting it right." Howell is a culinarian—goateed and talkative, a man of enthusiasms who uses high-end Mattson equipment to make an exceptional cup of espresso every afternoon. He started his career as a barista at Starbucks, and then realized that his vocation lay elsewhere. "A customer said to me, 'What do you want to be doing? Because you clearly don't want to be here,'" Howell said. "I told him, 'I want to be sitting in a room working on a better non-fat pudding.'"

The second team was headed by Barb Stuckey, an executive vice-president of marketing at Mattson and one of the firm's stars. She is slender and sleek, with short blond hair. She tends to think out loud, and, because she thinks quickly, she ends up talking quickly, too—in nervous brilliant bursts. Stuckey, Gundrum decided, would represent "managed" research and development—a traditional hierarchical team, as opposed to a partnership like Dea and Howell's. She would work with Doug Berg, who runs one of Mattson's product-development teams. Stuckey would draw the big picture. Berg would serve as sounding board and project director. His team would execute their conceptions.

Then Gundrum was at a technology conference in California and heard the software pioneer Mitch Kapor talking about the open-source revolution. Afterward, Gundrum approached Kapor. "I said to Mitch, 'What do you think? Can I apply this—some of the same principles—outside of software and bring it to the food industry?'" Gundrum recounted. "He stopped and said, 'Why the hell not!'" So Gundrum invited an élite group of food-industry bakers and scientists to collaborate online. They would be the third team. He signed up a senior person from Mars, Inc., someone from R. & D. at Kraft, the marketing manager for Nestlé Toll House refrigerated/frozen cookie dough, a senior director of R. & D. at Birds Eye Foods, the head of the innovation program for Kellogg's Morning Foods, the director of seasoning at McCormick, a cookie maven formerly at Keebler, and six more high-level specialists. Mattson's innovation manager, Carol Borba, who began her career as a line cook at Bouley, in Manhattan, was given the role of project manager. Two Mattson staffers were assigned to carry out the group's recommendations. This was the Dream Team. It is quite possible that this was the most talented group of people ever to work together in the history of the food industry.



"I can't find a decent bagel in this place."

• •

Soon after the launch of Project Delta, Steve Gundrum and his colleague Samson Hsia were standing around, talking about the current products in the supermarket which they particularly admire. "I like the Uncrustable line from Smuckers," Hsia said. "It's a frozen sandwich without any crust. It eats very well. You can put it in a lunchbox frozen, and it will be unfrozen by lunchtime." Hsia is a trim, silver-haired man who is said to know as much about emulsions as anyone in the business. "There's something else," he said, suddenly. "We just saw it last week. It's made by Jennie-O. It's turkey in a bag." This was a turkey that was seasoned, plumped with brine, and sold in a heat-resistant plastic bag: the customer simply has to place it in the oven. Hsia began to stride toward the Mattson kitchens, because he realized they actually had a Jennie-O turkey in the back. Gundrum followed, the two men weaving their way through the maze of corridors that make up the Mattson offices. They came to a large freezer. Gundrum pulled out a bright-colored bag. Inside was a second, clear bag, and inside that bag was a twelve-pound turkey. "This is one of my favorite innovations of the last year," Gundrum said, as Hsia nodded happily. "There is material science involved. There is food science involved. There is positioning involved. You can take this thing, throw it in your oven, and people will be blown away. It's that good. If I was Butterball, I'd be terrified."

Jennie-O had taken something old and made it new. But where had that idea come from? Was it a team? A committee? A lone turkey genius? Those of us whose only interaction with such innovations is at the point of sale have a naïve faith in human creativity; we suppose that a world capable of coming up with turkey in a bag is capable of coming up with the next big thing as well—a healthy cookie, a faster computer chip, an automobile engine that gets a hundred miles to the gallon. But if you're the one responsible for those bright new ideas there is no such certainty. You come up with one great idea, and the process is so miraculous that all you do is puzzle over how on earth you ever did it, and worry whether you'll ever be able to do it again.

The Mattson kitchens are a series of large, connecting rooms, running along the back of the building. There is a pilot plant in one corner—containing a mini version of the equipment that, say, Heinz would use to make canned soup, a soft-serve ice-cream machine, an industrial-strength pasta-maker, a colloid mill for making oil-and-water emulsions, a flash pasteurizer, and an eighty-five-thousand-dollar Japanese-made coextruder for, among other things, pastry-and-filling combinations. At any given time, the firm may have as many as fifty or sixty projects under way, so the kitchens are a hive of activity, with pressure cookers filled with baked beans bubbling in one corner, and someone rushing from one room to another carrying a tray of pizza slices with experimental toppings.

Dea and Howell, the XP team, took over part of one of the kitchens, setting up at a long stainless-steel lab bench. The countertop was crowded with tins of flour, a big white plastic container of wheat dextrin, a dozen bottles of liquid sweeteners, two plastic bottles of Kirkland olive oil, and, somewhat puzzlingly, three varieties of single-malt Scotch. The Project Delta brief was simple. All cookies had to have fewer than a hundred and thirty calories per serving. Carbohydrates had to be under 17.5 grams, saturated fat under two grams, fibre more than one gram, protein more than two grams, and so on; in other words, the cookie was to be at least fifteen per cent superior to the supermarket average in the major nutritional categories. To Dea and Howell, that suggested oatmeal, and crispy, as opposed to soft. "I've tried lots of cookies that are sold as soft and I never like them, because they're trying to be something that they're not," Dea explained. "A soft cookie is a fresh cookie, and what you are trying to do with soft is be a fresh cookie that's a month old. And that means you need to fake the freshness, to engineer the cookie."

The two decided to focus on a kind of oatmeal-chocolate-chip hybrid, with liberal applications of roasted soy nuts, toffee, and caramel. A straight oatmeal-raisin cookie or a straight low-cal chocolate-chip cookie was out of the question. This was a reflection of what might be called the Hidden Valley Ranch principle, in honor of a story that Samson Hsia often told about his years working on salad dressing when he was at Clorox. The couple who owned Hidden Valley Ranch, near Santa Barbara, had come up with a seasoning blend of salt, pepper, onion, garlic, and parsley flakes that was mixed with equal parts mayonnaise and buttermilk to make what was, by all accounts, an extraordinary dressing. Clorox tried to bottle it, but found that the buttermilk could not coexist, over any period of time, with the mayonnaise. The way to fix the problem, and preserve the texture, was to make the combination more acidic. But when you increased the acidity you ruined the flavor. Clorox's food engineers worked on

"He'll call you back as soon as he's had his coffee."

Hidden Valley Ranch dressing for close to a decade. They tried different kinds of processing and stability control and endless cycles of consumer testing before they gave up and simply came out with a high-acid Hidden Valley Ranch dressing—which promptly became a runaway best-seller. Why? Because consumers had never tasted real Hidden Valley Ranch dressing, and as a result had no way of knowing that what they were eating was inferior to the original. For those in the food business, the lesson was unforgettable: if something was new, it didn't have to be perfect. And, since healthful, indulgent cookies couldn't be perfect, they had to be new: hence oatmeal, chocolate chips, toffee, and caramel.

Cookie development, at the Mattson level, is a matter of endless iteration, and Dea and Howell began by baking version after version in quick succession—establishing the cookie size, the optimal baking time, the desired variety of chocolate chips, the cut of oats (bulk oats? rolled oats? groats?), the varieties of flour, and the toffee dosage, while testing a variety of high-tech supplements, notably inulin, a fibre source derived from chicory root. As they worked, they made notes on tablet P.C.s, which gave them a running electronic record of each version. "With food, there's a large circle of pretty good, and we're solidly in pretty good," Dea announced, after several intensive days of baking. A tray of cookies was cooling in front of him on the counter. "Typically, that's when you take it to the customers."

In this case, the customer was Gundrum, and the next week Howell marched over to Gundrum's office with two Ziploc bags of cookies in his hand. There was a package of Chips Ahoy! on the table, and Howell took one out. "We've been eating these versus Chips Ahoy!," he said.

The two cookies looked remarkably alike. Gundrum tried one of each. "The Chips Ahoy!, it's tasty," he said. "When you eat it, the starch hydrates in your mouth. The XP doesn't have that same granulated-sugar kind of mouth feel."

"It's got more fat than us, though, and subsequently it's shorter in texture," Howell said. "And so, when you break it, it breaks more nicely. Ours is a little harder to break."

By "shorter in texture," he meant that the cookie "popped" when you bit into it. Saturated fats are solid fats, and give a cookie crispness. Parmesan cheese is short-textured. Brie is long. A shortbread like a Lorna Doone is a classic short-textured cookie. But the XP cookie had, for health reasons, substituted unsaturated fats for saturated fats, and unsaturated fats are liquid. They make the dough stickier, and inevitably compromise a little of that satisfying pop.

"The whole-wheat flour makes us a little grittier, too," Howell went on. "It has larger particulates." He broke open one of the Chips Ahoy!. "See how fine the grain is? Now look at one of our cookies. The particulates are larger. It is part of what we lose by going with a healthy profile. If it was just sugar and flour, for instance, the carbohydrate chains are going to be shorter, and so they will dissolve more quickly in your mouth. Whereas with more fibre you get longer carbohydrate chains and they don't dissolve as quickly, and you get that slightly tooth-packing feel."

"It looks very wholesome, like something you would want to feed your kids," Gundrum said, finally. They were still only in the realm of pretty good.

Team Stuckey, meanwhile, was having problems of its own. Barb Stuckey's first thought had been a tea cookie, or, more specifically, a chai cookie—something with cardamom and cinnamon and vanilla and cloves and a soft dairy note. Doug Berg was dispatched to run the experiment. He and his team did three or four rounds of prototypes. The result was a cookie that tasted, astonishingly, like a cup of chai, which was, of course, its problem. Who wanted a cookie that tasted like a cup of chai? Stuckey called a meeting in the Mattson trophy room, where samples of every Mattson product that has made it to market are displayed. After everyone was done tasting the cookies, a bag of them sat in the middle of the table for forty-five minutes—and no one reached to take a second bite. It was a bad sign.

"You know, before the election *Good Housekeeping* had this cookie bakeoff," Stuckey said, as the meeting ended. "Laura Bush's entry was full of chocolate chips and had familiar ingredients. And Teresa Heinz went with pumpkin-spice cookies. I remember thinking, That's just like the Democrats! So not mainstream! I wanted her to win. But she's chosen this cookie that's funky and weird and out of the box. And I kind of feel the same way about the tea cookie. It's too far out, and will lose to something that's more comfortable for consumers."

Stuckey's next thought involved strawberries and a shortbread base. But shortbread was virtually impossible under the nutritional guidelines: there was no way to get that smooth butter-flour-sugar combination. So Team Stuckey switched to something closer to a strawberry-cobbler cookie, which had the Hidden Valley Ranch advantage that no one knew what a strawberry-cobbler cookie was supposed to taste like. Getting the carbohydrates down to the required 17.5 grams, though, was a struggle, because of how much flour and fruit cobbler requires. The obvious choice to replace the flour was almonds. But nuts have high levels of both saturated and unsaturated fat. "It became a balancing act," Anne Cristofano, who was doing the bench work for Team Stuckey, said. She baked batch after batch, playing the carbohydrates (first the flour, and then granulated sugar, and finally various kinds of what are called sugar alcohols, low-calorie sweeteners derived from hydrogenizing starch) against the almonds. Cristofano took a version to Stuckey. It didn't go well.

"We're not getting enough strawberry impact from the fruit alone," Stuckey said. "We have to find some way to boost the strawberry." She nibbled some more. "And, because of the low fat and all that stuff, I don't feel like we're getting that pop."

The Dream Team, by any measure, was the overwhelming Project Delta favorite. This was, after all, the Dream Team, and if any idea is ingrained in our thinking it is that the best way to solve a difficult problem is to bring the maximum amount of expertise to bear on it. Sure enough, in the early going the Dream Team was on fire. The members of the Dream Team did not doggedly fix on a single idea, like Dea and Howell, or move in fits and starts from chai sugar cookies to strawberry shortbread to strawberry cobbler, like Team Stuckey. It came up with thirty-four ideas, representing an astonishing range of cookie philosophies: a chocolate cookie with gourmet cocoa, high-end chocolate chips, pecans, raisins, Irish steel-cut oats, and the new Ultragrain White Whole Wheat flour; a bite-size oatmeal cookie with a Ceylon cinnamon filling, or chili and tamarind, or pieces of dried peaches with a cinnamon-and-ginger dusting; the classic seven-layer bar with oatmeal instead of graham crackers, coated in chocolate with a choice of coffee flavors; a "wellness" cookie, with an oatmeal base, soy and whey proteins, inulin and oat beta glucan and a combination of erythritol and sugar and sterol esters—and so on.

In the course of spewing out all those new ideas, however, the Dream Team took a difficult turn. A man named J. Hugh McEvoy (a.k.a. Chef J.), out of Chicago, tried to take control of the discussion. He wanted something exotic—not a health-food version of something already out there. But in the e-mail discussions with others on the team his sense of what constituted exotic began to get really exotic—"Chinese star anise plus fennel plus Pastis plus dark chocolate." Others, emboldened by his example, began talking about a possible role for zucchini or wasabi peas. Meanwhile, a more conservative faction, mindful of the Project Delta mandate to appeal to the whole family, started talking up peanut butter. Within a few days, the tensions were obvious:

From: Chef J.
Subject: <no subject>
Please keep in mind that less than 10 years ago, espresso, latte and dulce de leche were EXOTIC flavors / products dhat were *considered Unsuitable for the mainstream.*
And let's not even mention CHIPOTLE.

From: Andy Smith
Subject: Bought any Ben and Jerry's recently?
While we may not want to invent another Oreo or Chips Ahoy!, last I looked, World's Best Vanilla was B&J's # 2 selling flavor and Haagen Dazs' Vanilla (their top seller) outsold Dulce 3 to 1.

From: Chef J.
Subject: <no subject>
Yes. Gourmet Vanilla does outsell any new flavor. But we must remember that DIET vanilla does not and never has. It is the high end, gourmet segment of ice cream that is growing. Diet Oreos were vastly outsold by new entries like Snackwells. Diet Snickers were vastly outsold by new entries like balance bars. New Coke failed miserably, while Red Bull is still growing.
What flavor IS Red Bull, anyway?

Eventually, Carol Borba, the Dream Team project leader, asked Gundrum whether she should try to calm things down. He told her no; the group had to find its "own kind of natural rhythm." He wanted to know what fifteen high-powered bakers thrown together on a project felt like, and the answer was that they felt like chaos. They took twice as long as the XP team. They created ten times the headache.

Worse, no one in the open-source group seemed to be having any fun. "Quite honestly, I was expecting a bit more involvement in this," Howard Plein, of Edlong Dairy Flavors, confessed afterward. "They said, expect to spend half an hour a day. But without doing actual bench work—all we were asked to do was to come up with ideas." He wanted to bake: he didn't enjoy being one of fifteen cogs in a machine. To Dan Fletcher, of Kellogg's, "the whole thing spun in place for a long time. I got frustrated with that. The number of people involved seemed unwieldy. You want some diversity of youth and experience, but you want to keep it close-knit as well. You get some depth in the process versus breadth. We were a mile wide and an inch deep." Chef J., meanwhile, felt thwarted by Carol Borba; he felt that she was pushing her favorite, a caramel turtle, to the detriment of better ideas. "We had the best people in the country involved," he says. "We were irrelevant. That's the weakness of it. Fifteen is too many. How much true input can any one person have when you are lost in the crowd?" In the end, the Dream Team whittled down its thirty-four possibilities to one: a chewy oatmeal cookie, with a pecan "thumbprint" in the middle, and ribbons of caramel-and-chocolate glaze. When Gundrum tasted it, he had nothing but praise for its "cookie hedonics." But a number of the team members were plainly unhappy with the choice. "It is not bad," Chef J. said. "But not bad doesn't win in the food business. There was nothing there that you couldn't walk into a supermarket and see on the shelf. Any Pepperidge Farm product is better than that. Any one."

It may have been a fine cookie. But, since no single person played a central role in its creation, it didn't *seem* to anyone to be a fine cookie.

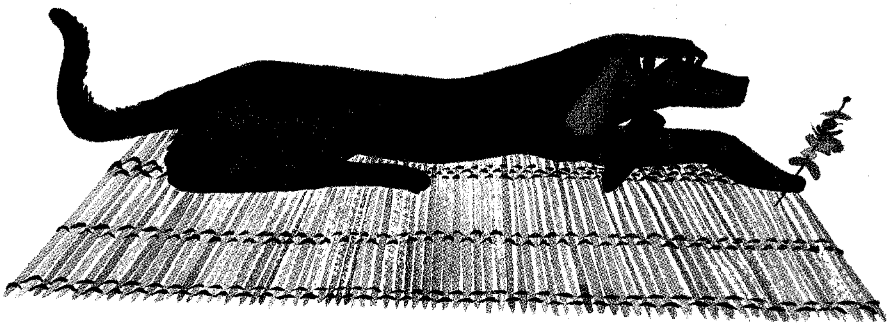
The strength of the Dream Team—the fact that it had so many smart people on it—was also its weakness: it had too many smart people on it. Size provides expertise. But it also creates friction, and one of the truths Project Delta exposed is that we tend to overestimate the importance of expertise and underestimate the problem of friction. Gary Klein, a decision-making consultant, once examined this issue in depth at a nuclear power plant in North Carolina. In the nineteen-nineties, the power supply used to keep the reactor cool malfunctioned. The plant had to shut down in a hurry, and the shutdown went badly. So the managers brought in Klein's consulting group to observe as they ran through one of the crisis rehearsals mandated by federal regulators. "The drill lasted four hours," David Klinger, the lead consultant on the project, recalled. "It was in this big operations room, and there were between eighty and eighty-five people involved. We roamed around, and we set up a video camera, because we wanted to make sense of what was happening."

When the consultants asked people what was going on, though, they couldn't get any satisfactory answers. "Each person only knew a little piece of the puzzle, like the radiation person knew where the radiation was, or the maintenance person would say, 'I'm trying to get this valve closed,' " Klinger said. "No one had the big picture. We started to ask questions. We said, 'What is your mission?' And if the person didn't have one, we said, 'Get out.' There were just too many people. We ended up getting that team down from eighty-five to thirty-five people, and the first thing that happened was that the noise in the room was dramatically reduced." The room was quiet and calm enough so that people could easily find those they needed to talk to. "At the very end, they had a big drill that the N.R.C. was going to regulate. The regulators said it was one of their hardest drills. And you know what? They aced it." Was the plant's management team smarter with thirty-five people on it than it was with eighty-five? Of course not, but the expertise of

TABOOS

DOG

A popular way of preparing dog in Vietnam is to roast it whole until the skin is crispy and golden, like a Peking duck. *Thit cho*, or dog meat, is an expensive delicacy, available mainly in the markets of the North, where the Chinese influence is most pronounced. But when I—formerly a pasty vegetarian, then for one sparse summer a vegan, and, finally, at nineteen, eating amorally again—decided to try it, I was in a dog-meat restaurant. It was July of 1996, and I had gone to Vietnam for a couple of weeks with a friend from school. Diplomatic relations with the United States had been restored only a year earlier, and even in the South, where we started out, we were regarded as an oddity. In Ho Chi Minh City, at what was once called the Museum of American War Crimes, I noticed some Japanese tourists photographing me as I looked at gruesome pictures of American soldiers with wounded Vietnamese. H.C.M.C., though, had elements of the familiar—pirated copies of "The Quiet American," G. I. Zippos for sale—and most people seemed pleased to see us, and our dollars. In Hanoi, where we spent the last days of the trip, no one spoke to us. The first time I remember being acknowledged was when I stepped on the wide sidewalk in front of Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum and a guard in a spotless white uniform pointed at me and frantically blew his whistle. I suppose we decided to eat dog in part because we wanted to fit in.



RUBEN TOLEDO

Our hotel was on a street of merchants that sold only ball bearings; elsewhere, you found nothing but shoes or straw baskets or grease vats. The street of dog restaurants was far outside the city, across the Red River, and we hired a cyclo driver to take us there. We stopped at the second or third place we saw—open-air and made of bamboo wood, on stilts over a shallow marsh. There were no tables, but grass mats were spread on the floor. A group of slight men in button-down shirts and slacks looked up when we walked in, and I realized that I was the only woman in the room. It wasn't until recently that I learned why: dog is eaten exclusively by men and, like snake or armadillo, it is associated with virility and stamina.

In the South, we had tried Beef Seven Ways: ground up and wrapped in betel-nut leaves, then grilled; on skewers; rolled into sausages; in vinegar broth fondue; grilled and sandwiched by fan-shaped rice paper and mint; as jerkylike carpaccio; and in soup. We resolved to try Dog Seven Ways. The first course was skewers. The meat was grayish and mild, slightly stringy. A dipping sauce was brought to the table—a variation on the standard fermented-fish sauce that is served with almost everything in Vietnam. It lent a sour-sweet flavor to the meat, and was a welcome distraction. Of course, there was the question of what kind of dog this was. Dogs are pets in Vietnam, too: we assured ourselves that these were farm-raised, probably in the surrounding countryside. (A Vietnamese chef recently told me that, indeed, the dogs that are consumed are bred for slaughter, and that the choicest dog meat is from "black dogs." Did he mean a recognizable breed? "No, just any dog that is black." In China, a breed was developed specifically for food: the chow.) Another course came; we picked at it solemnly. But by the time the third course arrived—tiny sausages—most of my enormous 333 beer was gone, and with it my restraint. I tried a sausage, pungent and gamy and flecked with bits of cilantro and lemongrass. Not bad.

Many cultures shun dog flesh: dogs are scavengers and carrion-feeders, and—more to the point—dogs don't mind eating human flesh. Yet people at home recoiled when they learned what I had eaten—not because they thought dogs were disgusting but because they thought dogs were wonderful. I was the disgusting one. If they had dogs, and their dogs were nearby, they instinctively put out a protective hand, the way a parent does to a child in the passenger seat when the car stops short. Only my father was amused. He had lived in Singapore in the sixties; his black Labrador puppy had been stolen, he always said, for food; on some level, he understood. In his version of my story, which he told as often as he could, I was a vegetarian until, tempted by Dog Seven Ways, I lapsed. "Woof," he liked to say under his breath to unnerve me. Eventually, he gave me a framed cartoon from this magazine that shows a businessman reading a résumé while he interviews a dog in a suit. The caption is: "You eat dog—excellent." I keep it on my desk.

—*Dana Goodyear*

those additional fifty people was more than cancelled out by the extra confusion and noise they created.

The open-source movement has had the same problem. The number of people involved can result in enormous friction. The software theorist Joel Spolsky points out that open-source software tends to have user interfaces that are difficult for ordinary people to use: "With Microsoft Windows, you right-click on a folder, and you're given the option to share that folder over the Web. To do the same thing with Apache, the open-source Web server, you've got to track down a file that has a different name and is stored in a different place on every system. Then you have to edit it, and it has its own syntax and its own little programming language, and there are lots of different comments, and you edit it the first time and it doesn't work and then you edit it the second time and it doesn't work."

Because there are so many individual voices involved in an open-source project, no one can agree on the right way to do things. And, because no one can agree, every possible option is built into the software, thereby frustrating the central goal of good design, which is, after all, to understand what to leave *out*. Spolsky notes that almost all the successful open-source products have been attempts to clone some preëxisting software program, like Microsoft's Internet Explorer, or Unix. "One of the reasons open source works well for Linux is that there isn't any real design work to be undertaken," he says. "They were doing what we would call chasing tail-lights." Open source was great for a science project, in which the goals were clearly defined and the technical hurdles easily identifiable. Had Project Delta been a Cool Whip bakeoff, an exercise in chasing tail-lights, the Dream Team would easily win. But if you want to design a truly innovative software program—or a truly innovative cookie—the costs of bigness can become overwhelming.

In the frantic final weeks before the bakeoff, while the Dream Team was trying to fix a problem with crumbling, and hit on the idea of glazing the pecan on the face of the cookie, Dea and Howell continued to make steady, incremental improvements.

"These cookies were baked five days ago," Howell told Gundrum, as he handed him a Ziploc bag. Dea was off somewhere in the Midwest, meeting with clients, and Howell looked apprehensive, stroking his goatee nervously as he stood by Gundrum's desk. "We used wheat dextrin, which I think gives us some crispiness advantages and some shelf-stability advantages. We have a little more vanilla in this round, which gives you that brown, rounding background note."

Gundrum nodded. "The vanilla is almost like a surrogate for sugar," he said. "It potentiates the sweetness."

"Last time, the leavening system was baking soda and baking powder," Howell went on. "I switched that to baking soda and monocalcium phosphate. That helps them rise a little bit better. And we baked them at a slightly higher temperature for slightly longer, so that we drove off a little bit more moisture."

"How close are you?" Gundrum asked.

"Very close," Howell replied.

Gundrum was lost in thought for a moment. "It looks very wholesome. It looks like something you'd want to feed your kids. It has very good aroma. I really like the texture. My guess is that it eats very well with milk." He turned back to Howell, suddenly solicitous. "Do you want some milk?"

Meanwhile, Barb Stuckey had a revelation. She was working on a tortilla-chip project, and had bags of tortilla chips all over her desk. "You have no idea how much engineering goes into those things," she said, holding up a tortilla chip. "It's greater than what it takes to build a bridge. It's crazy." And one of the clever things about cheese tortilla chips—particularly the low-fat versions—is how they go about distracting the palate. "You know how you put a chip in your mouth and the minute it hits your tongue it explodes with flavor?" Stuckey said. "It's because it's got this topical seasoning. It's got dried cheese powders and sugar and probably M.S.G. and all that other stuff on the outside of the chip."

THE BEST FALAFEL IN TOWN

Her idea was to apply that technique to strawberry cobbler—to take large crystals of sugar, plate them with citric acid, and dust the cookies with them. "The minute they reach your tongue, you get this sweet-and-sour hit, and then you crunch into the cookie and get the rest—the strawberry and the oats," she said. The crystals threw off your taste buds. You weren't focussed on the fact that there was half as much fat in the cookie as there should be. Plus, the citric acid brought a tangy flavor to the dried strawberries: suddenly they felt fresh.

Batches of the new strawberry-cobbler prototype were ordered up, with different formulations of the citric acid and the crystals. A meeting was called in the trophy room. Anne Cristofano brought two plastic bags filled with cookies. Stuckey was there, as was a senior Mattson food technologist named Karen Smithson, an outsider brought to the meeting in an advisory role. Smithson, a former pastry chef, was a little older than Stuckey and Cristofano, with an air of self-possession. She broke the seal on the first bag, and took a bite with her eyes half closed. The other two watched intently.

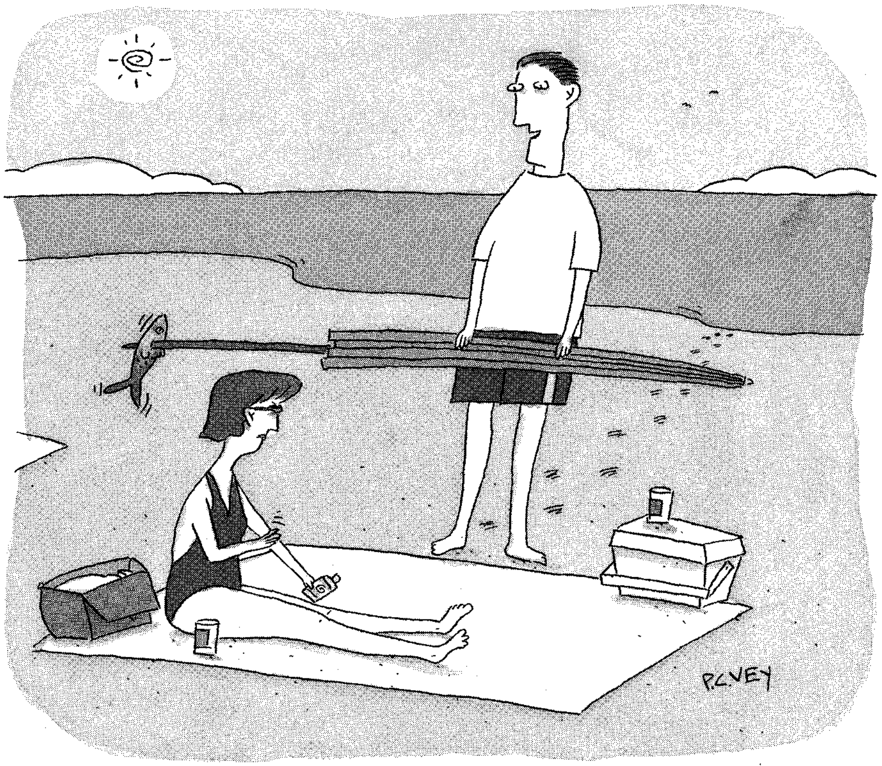
"Umm," Smithson said, after the briefest of pauses. "That is pretty darn good. And this is one of the healthy cookies? I would not say, 'This is healthy.' I can't taste the trade-off." She looked up at Stuckey. "How old are they?"

"Today," Stuckey replied.

"O.K. . . ." This was a complicating fact. Any cookie tastes good on the day it's baked. The question was how it tasted after baking and packaging and shipping and sitting in a warehouse and on a supermarket shelf and finally in someone's cupboard.

"What we're trying to do here is a shelf-stable cookie that will last six months," Stuckey said. "I think we're better off if we can make it crispy."

Smithson thought for a moment. "You can have either a crispy, low-moisture cookie or a soft and chewy cookie," she said. "But you can't get the outside crisp and the inside chewy. We know that. The moisture will migrate. It will equilibrate over time, so you end up with a cookie that's consistent all the way through. Remember we did all



"I love it when something has many uses."

that work on Mrs. Fields? That's what we learned."

They talked for a bit, in technical terms, about various kinds of sugars and starches. Smithson didn't think that the stability issue was going to be a problem.

"Isn't it compelling, visually?" Stuckey blurted out, after a lull in the conversation. And it was: the dried-strawberry chunks broke though the surface of the cookie, and the tiny citric-sugar crystals glinted in the light. "I just think you get so much more bang for the buck when you put the seasoning on the outside."

"Yet it's not weird," Smithson said, nodding. She picked up another cookie. "The mouth feel is a combination of chewy and crunchy. With the flavors, you have the caramelized sugar, the brown-sugar notes. You have a little bit of a chew from the oats. You have a flavor from the strawberry, and it helps to have a combination of the sugar alcohol and the brown sugar. You know, sugars have different deliveries, and sometimes you get some of the sweetness right off and some of it continues on. You notice that a lot with the artificial sweeteners. You get the sweetness that doesn't go away, long after the other flavors are gone. With this one, the sweetness is nice. The flavors come together at the same time and fade at the same time, and then you have the little bright after-hits from the fruit and the citric crunchies, which are"—she paused, looking for the right word—"brilliant."

The bakeoff took place in April. Mattson selected a representative sample of nearly three hundred households from around the country. Each was mailed bubble-wrapped packages containing all three entrants. The vote was close but unequivocal. Fourteen per cent of the households voted for the XP oatmeal-chocolate-chip cookie. Forty-one per cent voted for the Dream Team's oatmeal-caramel cookie. Forty-four per cent voted for Team Stuckey's strawberry cobbler.

The Project Delta postmortem was held at Chaya Brasserie, a French-Asian fusion restaurant on the Embarcadero, in San Francisco. It was just Gundrum and Steven Addis, from the first Project Delta dinner, and their wives. Dan Howell was immersed in a confidential project for a big food conglomerate back East. Peter Dea was working with Cargill on a wellness product. Carol Borba was in Chicago, at a meeting of the Food Marketing Institute. Barb Stuckey was helping Ringling Brothers rethink the food at its concessions. "We've learned a lot about the circus," Gundrum said. Meanwhile, Addis's firm had created a logo and a brand name for Project Delta. Mattson has offered to license the winning cookie at no cost, as long as a percentage of its sales goes to a charitable foundation that Mattson has set up to feed the hungry. Someday soon, you should be able to go into a supermarket and buy Team Stuckey's strawberry-cobbler cookie.

"Which one would you have voted for?" Addis asked Gundrum.

"I have to say, they were all good in their own way," Gundrum replied. It was like asking a mother which of her children she liked best. "I thought Barb's cookie was a little too sweet, and I wish the open-source cookie was a little tighter, less crumbly. With XP, I think we would have done better, but we had a wardrobe malfunction. They used too much batter, overbaked it, and the cookie came out too hard and thick."

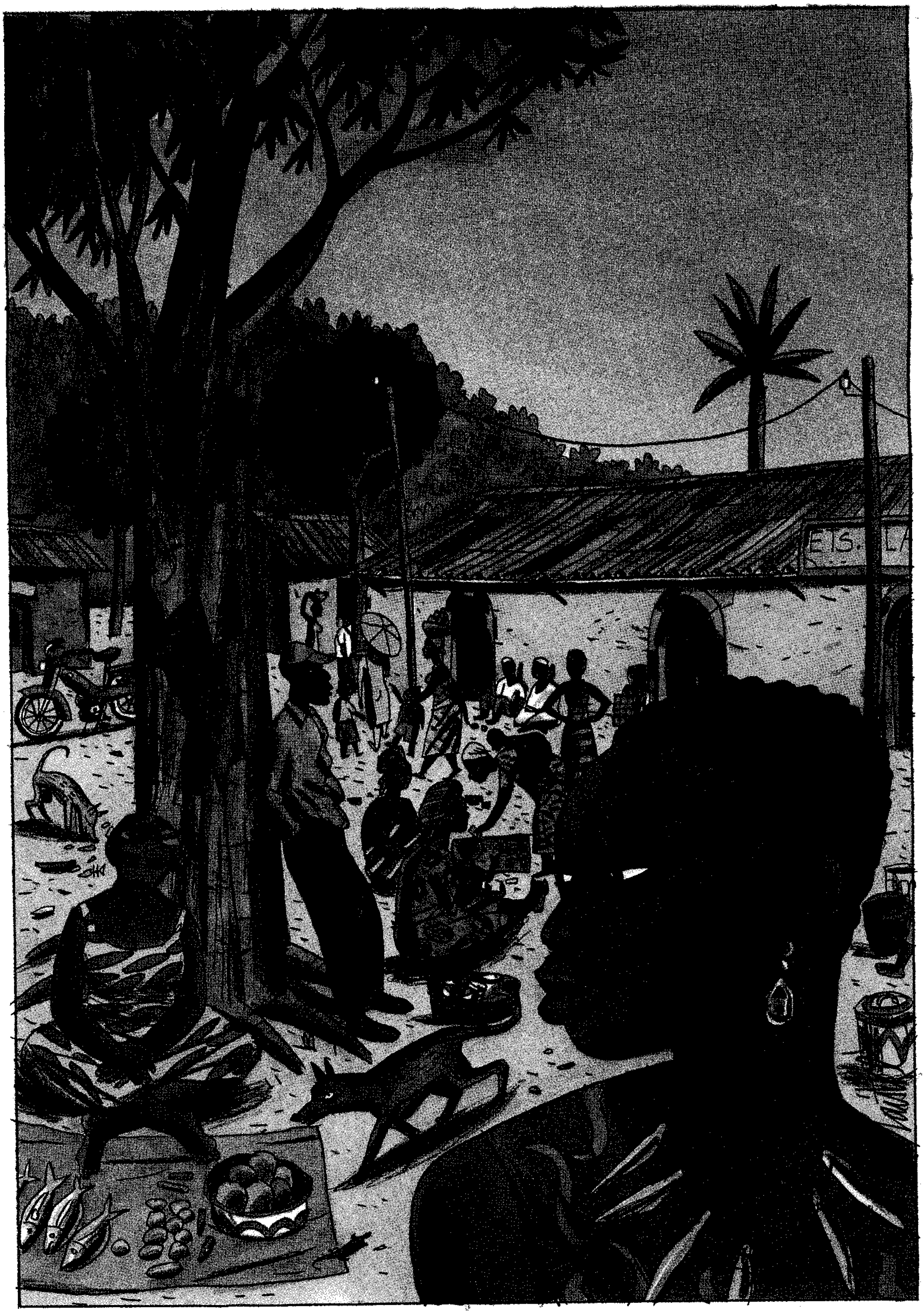
In the end, it was not so much which cookie won that interested him. It was who won—and why. Three people from his own shop had beaten a Dream Team, and the decisive edge had come not from the collective wisdom of a large group but from one person's ability to make a lateral connection between two previously unconnected objects—a tortilla chip and a cookie. Was that just Barb being Barb? In large part, yes. But it was hard to believe that one of the Dream Team members would not have made the same kind of leap had they been in an environment quiet enough to allow them to think.

"Do you know what else we learned?" Gundrum said. He was talking about a questionnaire given to the voters. "We were looking at the open-ended questions—where all the families who voted could tell us what they were thinking. They all said the same thing—all of them." His eyes grew wide. "They wanted better granola bars and breakfast bars. I would not have expected that." He fell silent for a moment, turning a granola bar over and around in his mind, assembling and disassembling it piece by piece, as if it were a model airplane. "I thought that they were pretty good," he said. "I mean, there are so many of them out there. But apparently people want them better." ♦

FICTION

CLUB DES AMIS

BY TONY D'SOUZA



Wu's story was simple: he'd come to West Africa from Shanghai in search of a better life. Throughout the nineteen-nineties, a number of Chinese herbalists had established themselves in the major and minor cities of Ivory Coast; Wu's cousin was one of these, and he'd urged Wu to join him. Wu chose Séguéla, a dusty Muslim town in the north of the country, and spent his first few months there taking lessons in the rudiments of West African French and shelling out piles of his cousin's CFA francs to entertain the city's functionaries in the bars. Then he hung his shingle in the marketplace, and the patients began to come. Mostly they were soldiers and teachers who had contracted venereal diseases from the local prostitutes. They knew that word would get out if they went to the town's hospital, so instead they went to Wu and he cured them with acupuncture and erythromycin. Even the city's two Ivorian doctors came in now and again with embarrassing rashes. On weekends, Wu rode his *mobylette* into the surrounding villages to treat the chiefs and their sons for these same maladies, at prorated village prices. His practice thrived, and soon enough he was able to send for his wife and son in China.

Before I met Wu, I had already spotted his wife; I always enjoyed the sight of her, a petite Chinese woman in a tight pink wrap mincing about the crowded Séguéla market on clogs that elevated her above the fish heads and the mud, a pink parasol open over her head like a flower. Wherever she went, she was followed by a long train of market children singing "Chinese woman! Chinese woman!" and by mangy homeless dogs, who were attracted, perhaps, by her strange scent. I was glad to see her not only because her presence in that obscure place gave me a pleasant shock but because she was even more alien there than I was. Whenever we crossed paths, the children who'd been following me shouting "White man! White man!" would abandon me to join her entourage. I understood that her life in Africa must have been hell.

JACQUES DE LOUSTAL

"Peiching hated it here," Wu told me one night. We were at his house drinking warm beer, playing poker for the shrimp tails left over from our dinner. By that time, Wu was alone, his house big and empty around him. "Everywhere she went, the children followed. In the market, the women always wanted to touch her skin. I hired a tutor to teach her French, but she never picked it up. Not one word. Her heart was in China. When Wen died, she was ruined. A few months later, she went home."

It was a rainy night, and, for a change, Séguéla was quiet. Wu showed me pictures of his wedding. When he and Peiching had got married, they were both poor students, and the best honeymoon Wu had been able to afford was a trip to Beijing, where they stayed with his relatives. One picture showed them in a garden outside the Imperial Palace. The colors of the flowers had faded, like the rest of the picture, to sepia. Wu looked thin and young, with a cigarette between his fingers, and his wife looked shy. They were both wearing jeans, and neither was smiling, but something in their rigid postures suggested the significance of the moment.

Everyone in China had advised Wu against bringing his son to Africa. Africa was full of danger and disease; there were too many risks for a family's only child. But Wen and his father were close, and the boy decided to postpone university to be with his dad. Wu showed me a picture of his son, too. Wen had been a tall boy, pale and serious-looking, his face neat and narrow like his mother's, handsome. He was standing in front of a jade lion in a snowy square somewhere in Xian. He wore a heavy wool coat, military issue, and snowflakes rested on his shoulders like petals. As Wu showed me the picture under the naked bulb of his room, he said, in a soft voice, "I took him here to Xian for his graduation. To sightsee. To celebrate. One child in China. One son. Can you imagine? In a world of rain, one single drop belongs to you."

Africa was difficult for Peiching, but Wen took to it as though he'd been waiting his whole life for the release. He was just eighteen when he came, and for whatever reason the Africans took him in as though they'd been waiting for him as well. He played basketball with the soldiers' sons every evening at the stadium court. He borrowed his father's *mobylette* and disappeared into the bush for days with friends. He ate fried plantain chips sold by the street venders, put away his leather shoes and wore foam flip-flops that he bought in the market. He went swimming in the distant Marahoué River, and worked in the rice fields with people he barely knew. In three months, he was speaking Worodougou as if he'd been born to it.

Every warning his father gave him—about intestinal parasites, about bilharzia and melanoma, about AIDS and the local girls—he laughed off. Six months after he'd stepped off the bus in Séguéla on a dusty Sunday with his mother nervous beside him, Wen had a local girlfriend, and two months after that he told his father that the girl was pregnant. For the only time in his life, Wu struck his son. Who knows why? Maybe it was the stress of worrying about the boy, or the mounting difficulties of his own psychic isolation in a foreign land; maybe it was his frustration with the corrupt Ivorian government, which was forever presenting new documents he had to buy, new taxes he had to pay. Maybe it was all of these. Whatever the reason, Wu slapped his son again and again. They were out on the porch, which opened onto the market. It was the first hard rain of the season, and people stood under the tin roofing of every stall, calling to their friends and laughing as they watched this exchange between the Chinese men.

Wu said, "What sort of life will a half-black have in China?"

Wen shouted, "I live here now! I'm never going back to China!"

Wu tried to grab his son's arm, but Wen shook free and ran off.

For three months, there was no word from him. Then, halfway through the fourth, a messenger came from the girl's village, thirty miles to the east, beyond Mankono, where the couple had fled. The messenger was a poor man in village rags. He wasn't able to bring his eyes up to meet Wu's as he broke the news he'd carried with him: Wen was dead.

I looked at the photo of the tall and serious boy with snowflakes on his shoulders, and asked, "What in the world happened to him?"

"It's Africa. Who knows what happened? Here we sleep under nets. There he was living in a hut. He wasn't on any medication. It could have been malaria. It could have been cholera, typhoid, plague, fever. They could have poisoned him. He was dead, that was all we knew. It took me three days to tell my wife. Still, I know that she knew. She wouldn't talk to me, and when I finally told her she slapped me. She blamed me for everything. A few weeks more and she went home. She said that she had made a mistake in choosing me for a husband. I can never go home now, do you understand? One child in China. The only possession of any value. They told me not to bring him here. Even if I did go back, they would not forgive me."

My friendship with Wu developed cautiously. I was a relief worker for Potable Water International, living in the village of Téguéla, twelve miles away in the bush. The odd weekends that I went into Séguéla for a break from my duties, I'd invariably run into Wu at Club des Amis, a bar that sat next to the remnants of a Catholic church that had been burned in the last uprising. Wen had died right around the time that I arrived in Ivory Coast, but I didn't know that then. I knew Wu only as someone to drink with: the strange Chinese doctor who'd somehow ended up in this backwater, a chain-smoker who never let me pay for drinks. None of the other relief workers in the region befriended him, because his French was incredibly difficult to understand, and because they came into Séguéla from their villages looking to get drunk in peace. That was what I wanted, too, but Wu sought me out. And once I got used to his French I began to look forward to seeing him. He was educated and knew the world. We'd have long, drunken debates about politics and the future of relations between our countries. Often, we'd bring a few beers back to his three-room place on the edge of the market and watch an old Jackie Chan movie on his portable DVD player. I'd wake the next day on a wicker mat, a thin sheet draped over me.

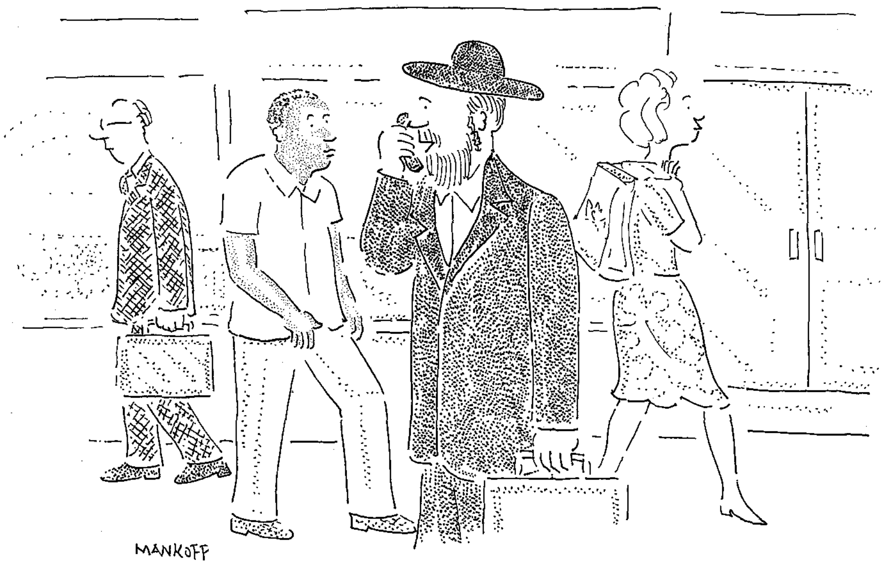
In the mornings, I was always embarrassed to have got so drunk, but Wu set me at ease. I'd sit on a crate in his sparse kitchen and watch him standing at the kerosene burner in his underwear, cooking noodles and shrimp, smoking a cigarette and tapping his ashes to the floor. We ate out of steel bowls balanced on our knees, clicking our chopsticks and slurping loudly, and he would tell me which local high-school teacher had recently contracted gonorrhea. He told me that one day I would have to visit his sister in Queens, New York, and say hello to her for him. She'd made it to America in a cargo container, and now owned her own takeaway shop. He promised that she'd treat me like a king.

"Let's have a drink together at the club, *petit*," he'd say, lifting his eyebrows, but it would still be early morning, and I'd beg off. I was in Africa to assist my village; I had to get back to it. I'd find a ride out to the bush on a logging truck, and for the next six weeks or so I wouldn't think of Wu at all.

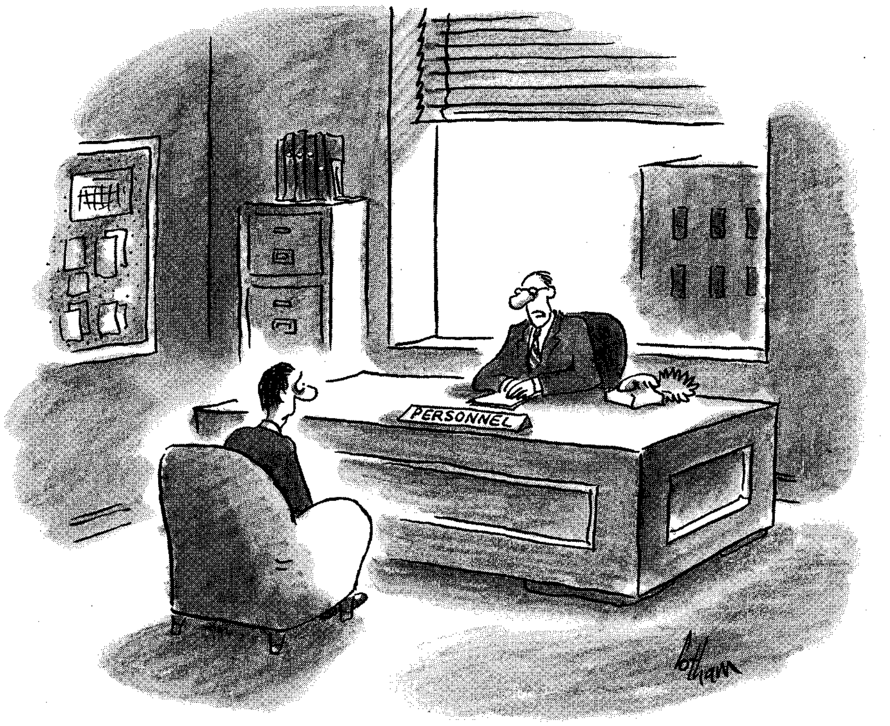
I liked Wu because he was kind to me, and because we shared our isolation. Our friendship grew, and I invited him to celebrate my twenty-sixth birthday with me at Club des Amis. Late that night, back at his house, Wu told me what had happened after Wen's death.

Before his wife left, Wu had taken her out to Mankono on his *mobylette*. Peiching sat behind him, sidesaddle, which was her way. The road was cracked and broken, washed out in places from the rain, and often they had to get off and he'd push the motorbike while she walked. They rode through forest, then through long and lush savanna, the baobab trees standing like sentinels. His wife had never been outside Séguéla; she was shocked by how primitive the villages were. People waved at them, but she pinched Wu to tell him not to stop. Again and again, she said, "How could our son have lived like this?"

The girl's village was a nothing place in the middle of nowhere: a collection of huts and the meagre people who lived in them. The chief—accompanied by what seemed like the entire population of the village—came out to meet them. For whatever reason, Wu was no longer angry at this point, and his wife, under her parasol, was quiet. The chief presented the girl to them, and she was clearly pregnant. What had his son seen in this small African girl? Wu wondered. All he knew of her was that she'd sold dried chilies in the market. There were dozens of girls like that. "Where did my son sleep?" his wife wanted to know. Wu translated her question to the chief, then to the girl and her family, and the chief led them through the identical thatched huts of the village, to one at the far end. Wu and his wife peered into the gloom of the simple structure. On the dirt floor was a frayed raffia mat, nothing more. "This is where my husband slept," the girl told them. She showed them a ceramic cistern of water, a small calabash dipping cup. "This is the water I brought him to drink. This is the stool where he sat in the evening." The girl seemed frightened. Wu felt sure that if it weren't for the chief she would have run off into the bush.



"And remember, if you need anything I'm available 24/6."



"I think you should know that there are some here who wanted to desecrate your résumé."

Apparently, Wen's few possessions had already been claimed by the living. These were brought forth from the crowd and set at Wu's feet. There was a well-worn machete and a tattered green boubou. The chief barked at a young man standing near him, and the young man removed his flip-flops. The chief set them before Wu and said, "These were his shoes."

A gnarled witch doctor approached them with his staff, looked down at his feet, and told Wu in a quiet voice, "The boy was sick for three days. The ancestors called for him. He was strong, strong in his heart. But the ancestors called to him with hunger. He died in my hut as I prayed over him. He was strong until the end." The witch doctor pointed to another hut, the hut where Wen had died. It looked the same as the rest.

The chief led them out into the tall grass of the savanna. They followed a path to a clearing under a stand of yellow and red blooming acacia. There were old graves here, mounds of stony soil where the earth had been pried open and turned, and behind these was another mound, the soil fresh and red, soft-looking, not so old. The chief said, "This is where he lies," and he scattered rice onto the ground for luck.

It was a heap of earth, pebbles all through it like rough gems, no marker of any sort, already settling down to anonymity. "Why didn't you bring him into the town when he was sick?" Wu asked the chief.

The girl spoke. She said, "My husband did not want to go into the town."

"Why didn't you bring us his body?"

The chief said, "He prayed with us. He died as a Muslim. We buried him here in the Muslim way."

Wu gave the girl money and told her to come to him in Séguéla. He promised to take care of her, to help her with her every need. Wu's wife took the green boubou and the flip-flops. The girl's mother hurried forward with a blue pagne and wrapped these things carefully in it. Wu drove them back to Séguéla, his wife holding the blue package close to her chest. He knew that his life with Peiching was over. As they left the village, Wu tried to see it, and the land, through his son's eyes. White clouds scudded through the vast sky, and for the first time—and only briefly—Wu allowed himself to admit that Africa was beautiful.

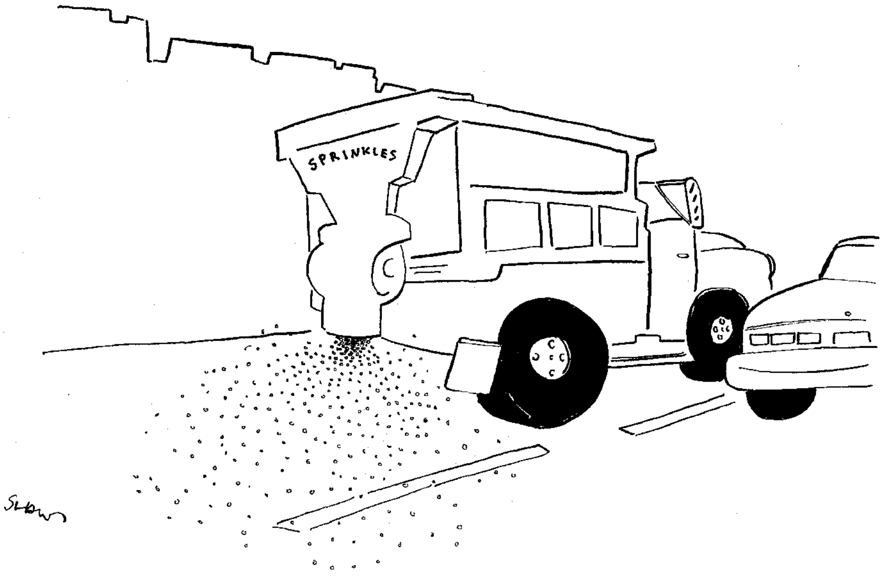
Wu's story was known in all the villages, including mine. No one had ever told it to me because I hadn't known to ask. One night, I said to my neighbors as we sat around the evening fire, "Everyone knows the story of the Chinese doctor, don't they?"

One of the young men nodded and said, "Oh, yes. It has been happening all the time you have been here." He waved his hand before his face in the night as though he were trying to ward away trouble. He said, "A terrible story. Who knows what genies have their hands in it? Now the doctor wants the small boy. The girl does not want to give up her son. Who can win? Trouble like this is real trouble. Trouble like this must be given a wide berth." Everyone around the fire mumbled assent.

It was some time before the girl took Wu up on his offer, but after the child was born she came to live with her aunt in Séguéla, and brought the infant to Wu every day. Wu still had money then, and he lavished it on his grandson. He brought toys up from Abidjan—colorful balls, a plastic dump truck—and he bought Dutch wax pagnes and closed-toe shoes for the girl. She called the boy Moussa, a Muslim name, but Wu called him Didi. I was never sure exactly what this meant, but I had a sense that it meant "little."

Wu stopped drinking about this time, and for months I didn't see him. Still, I kept abreast of his story by asking around. Once, I stopped by his house to see how he was. I saw the toys in the entryway, and understood that Wu was happy, that his grandson was in his life now, that Wu's life had diverged from mine in a good way.

The rainy season became the dry, and the villagers brought out harvest masks to dance benedictions to the ancestors. We all had a few weeks of rest, and then Ramadan was upon us. I rose at the imam's call to eat okra soup with my neighbors by morning firelight in the darkness, and gave up food and drink during the day, though I didn't pray. There was a prolonged lull in the violence that marked those years, and everyone began to wonder if it would



last. Then, just when it seemed as if the nation had righted itself, fighting broke out everywhere.

Once the government had regained control of the city, I went to Séguéla to see what had happened. The scene was one I'd witnessed nearly half a dozen times already: the homes of soldiers and Christians burned, the prefect's offices looted and in shambles. Club des Amis was still standing, and the proprietor and his sisters greeted me warmly. The owner's cousin was a subcommander of the region's military detachment, and the heavy machine gun he had set up to protect the bar was still on its sandbags—a testament to how dangerous things had been. Wu was drinking in the corner. I was excited to see him, but he didn't seem like himself at all. As I approached, I saw that his ashtray was full of cigarette butts, that he'd set a long row of the beer bottles he'd emptied on the ground beside him. His face was dark with stubble. He coughed and looked sick.

"Did you ride out the trouble here, Wu?" I asked him.

He nodded, waved his hand. He said, "They looted my house. Everything is gone."

"What about Didi?"

"My grandson? The girl took him away weeks ago. She only wanted money. She told me I had to pay fifty thousand CFA every time I wanted to see him. She refused to leave him with me, because she was afraid I would take him to China. I told the police what she was doing. She heard of this and ran away. It's her family who looted my house. I have not otherwise had trouble here."

We drank a few tall beers together, but the drinking didn't help his mood. He was maudlin, smoking. The evening settled over us and turned to night, and Wu, his head lolling, wanted to drive himself home. Instead, I put him on the back of his *mobylette* and, one eye closed for precision, drove us there myself. All the windows of his house had been broken, and glass shards littered every room. They'd taken his television, his bed, his stove. On the floor in the debris were muddied aerograms covered in Chinese characters, and bent pictures of his son.

We sat on crates in his bedroom, lit cigarettes. Wu had composed himself during the ride over. "Jack," he said, waving his hand at the mess, "this is the life I've made for myself, isn't it? I came here because of greed, and this is what I've earned." What was there to say? Wu picked up one of the pictures, smoothed it flat on his thigh, and studied it a long time. He said, "You call me Wu. Everyone here calls me Wu. That is not my name. My name is Chang. Chang Gochiang."

"Chang Gochiang. What is Wu?"

"A sound. Someone else's name. Chang Gochiang is too difficult for them to say. My cousin told me to tell them 'Wu.' It is the same name as he uses. Many Chinese here use it. It is easy for them to say. But my name is Chang Gochiang."

I helped him sweep up and bought a cheap plastic mat from a night vender for him to sleep on. I worried that he would kill himself, but what could I do? When I left, he was sleeping on the mat in his underwear, the pictures of his life in a stack beside his head like a pillow.

Wu lingered on in Séguéla after that uprising; he became something of a fool. To the locals, he was a strange man from China with a troubled past: a dead son, a lost wife, a half-breed grandchild somewhere in the distant villages. To the functionaries in the bars, he was a drunk, a wretch, a foreigner who'd come where he shouldn't have for profit, who had lost everything because of greed. Besides, he knew too many of their dirty secrets.

Wu bought another bed, and another television set to watch the Ivorian news. He would greet me perfunctorily at his door, as though our friendship belonged to a time he didn't want to remember; he wouldn't invite me in. When I saw him at the bar, he was usually buying beers for a table full of rowdy soldiers, or sitting with the magistrates and judges in their fine suits, pushing tumblers of Johnnie Walker their way. His French deteriorated. With drunken soldiers egging him on, he would arm-wrestle shoeshine boys, dirty *fous*, mugging to make everyone laugh when he lost. Now and again, witnessing his strange humiliation, I'd catch his eye from across the bar. Then his face would compose itself briefly, as though he wanted to say, "You know this is not who I am."

In my village, people were of two minds. Some would argue, "It's terrible to lose a son. But the girl does not want to lose hers, either. Shouldn't a child belong to its mother? The Chinaman wants the boy to ease his loss. But doesn't the girl have a right to her son?"

Others would say, "But why must that girl make so much trouble? The child is not a normal child here—his life will be one of ridicule. The Chinaman is wealthy, the girl will have other children. Better to let this troubled one go, keep the new ones, which will be truly black."

It wasn't a secret that Wu was paying

bribes right and left at this time. It was rumored that he'd given five hundred thousand CFA to the prefect and an equal sum to the district judge, and that each and every night he had drinks and cigarettes carried out to the soldiers who manned the checkpoints in and out of the city. A half-breed child was a difficult thing to hide. Soldiers in plain clothes went to the girl's village, searched it, then searched all the villages of her relatives. Her father and brothers were brought to the Séguéla jail one by one, and fined enormous sums on the premise that their identity papers weren't in order. No one's identity papers were in order in the Muslim north. The girl's relatives were tortured and released. If they knew where she had gone, they didn't let on.

Rumors circulated. Some had her living with a Senufo cousin outside Korhogo. Others put her in a Bozo fishing village north of Béoumi. The more romantic versions claimed that she'd drowned herself and the child in the Marahoué, or that a French dignitary had fallen in love with her in Abidjan, and whisked her and Didi away to Paris.

The soldiers promised Wu that they were closing in. These reports made it even into the villages. Someone had seen a little boy with tea-colored skin and Chinese eyes wandering lost in a market in Boundiali, crying for his mother. Another had seen the girl, with the child tied to her back, trying to cross the Burkina border at Ferkéssédougou. Violence flared up here and there: Dioula labor strikes in Abidjan, Mossi lockouts on the great palm-oil plantations. The religious divisions rising in the country were like moisture gathering in the air. Soon, the dry season would end in great thunderstorms, too.

Sometimes I would try to imagine the girl. Who was she? All I knew was that she had sold chilies in the Séguéla market, that she'd grown up in a village as obscure and primitive as the one I lived in. Somehow she'd made it into town, where the street lights and the few rusted taxis must have impressed her, and where she'd fallen for Wu's son.

There were examples of such flirtations every day in the market: bored girls teasing unemployed boys about their rags or their new muscles; boys teasing girls about their servitude, their illiteracy, their frayed pagnes. The boys said the girls were as skinny as plucked chickens; the girls told the boys they had donkeys' teeth. All day it went on. And at night, after meals were eaten and dishes washed, the young people would stroll in tight groups under the orange street lights, and once in a while some bold girl or boy would glance around for aunts or cousins, then cross the street, touch an arm, grasp a hand, pass some moments in a shadow beside the loved one, too shy at first to say anything at all.

There would have been stars in the sky the night they met. Perhaps she had said to him, "Tell me about your country." Or perhaps he'd said to her, "Do you know about my country?" As an unmarried girl, she would have always been under the eye of her aunt and her aunt's household. For his part, with his mother always home, Wen couldn't possibly have brought her there. Maybe there was a grassy place in the bush where they could sit and look at the town's lights. Maybe Wen had a friend who loaned them a room. Somehow, somewhere, they had got to know each other and had fallen in love. The girl called Wen "husband," and he liked that. Did she imagine that they would live together in her village forever? Or had she hoped to travel with him to China one day? Had either of them stopped to consider the complications their child would face? Or had everything seemed golden and bright in the throes of their love and their youth?

What I finally wondered was this: Had her heart been broken? Did she feel the loss of Wen as much as Wu did?

Wu came to my village one Friday afternoon when everyone of age was praying at the mosque. I was sitting outside my hut eating the season's last guavas, and some small children led him to me, running in front of his *mobylette*. The children were naked, potbellied, crusts dried under their noses; they stood quietly a short distance away from us, as though stunned by malnutrition and fatigue. Wu parked his bike, looked at me in my field rags, peered inside the gloom of my hut, grunted. "It's a wonder that you are not dead, too," he said.

Wu looked neat. He was clean-shaven, and his hair had been cut. The

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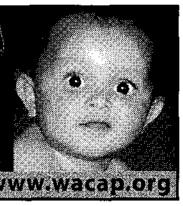

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wrecked and humiliated man I'd seen grovelling in the bars the past few months had somehow been returned to the doctor I had once known. "I need a favor, Jack," he said. "I've never asked you for anything. Now I need your help. They have the girl in the Mankono jail. My money's gone. I need to borrow a hundred thousand CFA, a document fee. But I also need a witness. Someone must sign that I am Didi's legal guardian. No one in Séguéla will do this for me. If you won't do it, then they will release her and I will never have my grandson."

Of course, I did not want to have to make this decision. With all the adults at the mosque, there was no one to lend me support, or to make an excuse for why I couldn't go with him. There was simply a thin middle-aged man from China who had once been my friend, and some naked children staring at us numbly, not even blinking.

For a long moment, I didn't say anything. Wu looked away, and the children stared at me like a council of judges. The sky was blue, the day yellow. I set down the guava, went into my hut, took off my field clothes, and pulled on my green boubou. I slipped my identity papers into my pocket. When I went out, Wu kick-started his *mobylette*, and I got on behind him. "Tell the chief I've gone to Mankono. I will be back tomorrow, *inshallah*."

The children nodded grimly. The oldest girl said in her delicate voice, "*Allah ee kissee, Tonton*"—"God bless your route, Uncle."

Wu waited outside the bank in Séguéla with the motor running, and when I came out I gave him the money. Then he drove us through the streets to the courthouse, and the soldier at the gate told us the judge was in the bar. We found him there, in a purple suit, drinking whiskey at a table of soldiers. The music was loud and they were all laughing. They laughed anew at me in my boubou: a white man dressed as a Muslim. After a minute, the judge wiped his mouth with a cloth napkin, grew serious, and said, "*Bon*. Do you have the money, Wu?"

Wu handed him the stack. The judge flipped through it quickly, tossed two soiled bills on the table, and folded the rest of it into his inner breast pocket. He put on his mirrored sunglasses and said something to the soldiers in Baoulé, and then we went out to where his driver waited in a black Mercedes.

The ride to Mankono from Séguéla was long and silent. Even with the air-conditioning on, it was hot in the car, and I could smell the judge's sweet cologne: lilac. The road was red and dusty, the savanna wide and dry on either side of it, a flat yellow plain. There were no other vehicles in sight, and, in the few villages we passed, people stood up from their labors to peer at us.

"You'll witness for him?" the judge said to me as we sat in the car on the Marahoué ferry, the old bargeman poling us across the dirty river on an oil-drum raft.

"I will," I told him.

"Never in my life could I have imagined this, both a white man and a Chinaman in my car at the same time. It was very good that you brought your son to Africa, Wu. So many unexpected things this decision has brought all of us."

In Mankono, a soldier opened the gates of the jail and we drove through in a cloud of dust. Chickens scratched in the dry yard, and the office was bare and hot, a metal desk beneath a metal fan. The judge dictated to the uniformed gendarme at the typewriter, who worked carefully and deliberately. On the wall above him was a picture of the current general-president, looking just as pleased in his suit and sash as he did on the nation's postage stamps. Beyond the door was a row of cells. Now and again, a yell sounded.

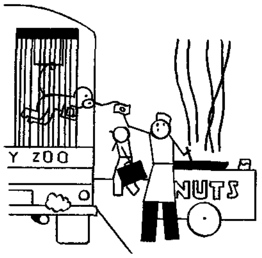
A photographer came from the town on a bicycle and took Wu's picture against a bare wall. Wu didn't smile. The judge stamped and signed the documents, called Wu to sign, and then me. The documents were ornate, colorful with the blue ink of the round stamp. I didn't bother reading what they said. The photographer, a Dioula in threadbare slacks, asked the judge's permission to leave, but the judge told him to take another picture. He had me stand on one side of him, and Wu on the other. "A white, a yellow, and a black," the judge said, and then the picture was taken.

"Now may I go, *patron*?" the photographer asked, inching toward the door. Wu gave him some coins from his pocket and said, "One of me and my friend." He held my hand as the photographer took our picture. Again, we didn't smile.

The gendarme barked for the soldier outside to come in, and handed him a thick ring of keys. The soldier went through to the cells, and I heard a metal door creak open. Then the soldier returned, pushing a small Worodougou girl by the shoulder. Her feet were bare, her wraps dirty. She didn't look at any of us. Something in her downcast eyes said that she'd had enough. In her arms she held a small boy who blinked at the daylight streaming in from the window. His skin was the color of tea, his eyes were Chinese, his hair was straight and black. He was a handsome boy, delicate and frightened, wearing khaki shorts and a collared shirt, as though dressed for an occasion.

"No problems, now, *muso*," the judge said, pointing his thick finger at her, "and you'll be free to go. Understand?" She nodded. The gendarme lifted the child from her by the arm, and the boy clung to her wrap, began to cry. He set the child on the desk, and pushed the girl out into the yard with the stock of his rifle. Through the window, I could see him push her all the way out through the gates and onto the street.

Wu called to his grandson in a tender voice, and held out his arms as if he were coaxing a reluctant pet. I thought for an instant that Didi would cry, but he didn't. Perhaps he'd had enough as well. The gendarme passed Didi to Wu, and Wu held the child close to him, petted his hair, kissed the top of his head. He spoke softly to the boy in Chinese, and Didi set his arms around his grandfather's neck, as if he were tired.



From the window of the car as we left, I saw the girl standing alone on the roadside, watching us go. She looked like any of the poor women there, but prettier, a small thing in the crowd. I assumed that she would cry out, chase us. But she held her shawl closed at her neck, and then a train of women in colorful wraps came by with basins of water on their heads, and the girl was lost among them, and in the swirling dust the car had left behind.

For a while, Didi complained and kicked, and then he fell asleep. Wu closed his eyes and held him, oblivious now of the bumps in the road, of the film reel of Africa outside the window, which for him was becoming a memory.

A few weeks later, the photographer came all the way from Mankono to my village on a bicycle to present me with the picture of Wu and me at the Mankono jail. I asked if he had news of the girl, but he shook his head no. Then he tucked the money I offered him into the pocket of his shirt, mounted his bicycle, and started back the way he'd come. In the picture, Wu and I looked more severe than in real life, taller. The fact that we'd been holding hands didn't make it into the frame.

There was a certified envelope from Abidjan waiting for me at the Séguéla post office the next time I went in. I waited until I was back in my hut to open it. Along with the money, Wu had included a brief note, which someone had typed for him in French. The Chinese Embassy had arranged a visa for Didi, and they would soon be leaving for Shanghai. "Things are good now," he wrote. "What small thing I could have salvaged from this nightmare, I have." He thanked me for what I'd done for him, wished me the best. If I was ever in Queens, I must visit his sister. If ever in Shanghai, I must come and see him.

Time passed, and the news that my neighbors listened to on their transistor radios spoke of more and more trouble. Everyone was thinking about what would happen to the country, about what would happen to the village, and how they would survive the coming war. I was thinking, too. Somewhere, in the bush beyond Mankono, a young girl gazed at these same stars and wondered about her son. Somewhere in a tenement in Shanghai, a boy was growing taller each day, learning in a new language how to articulate to his grandfather his need now for rice, for candy, for juice, for toys, and, soon enough, for his father as well as his mother. ◆

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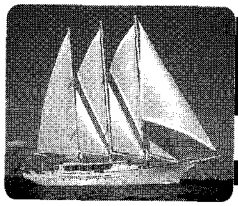

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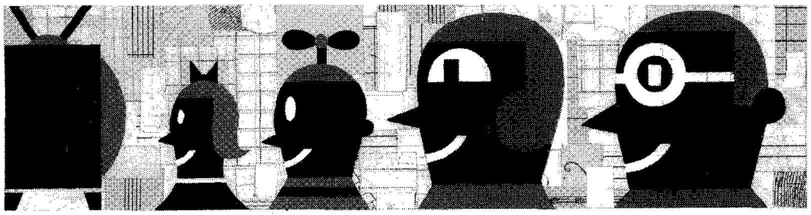


A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE QUEST

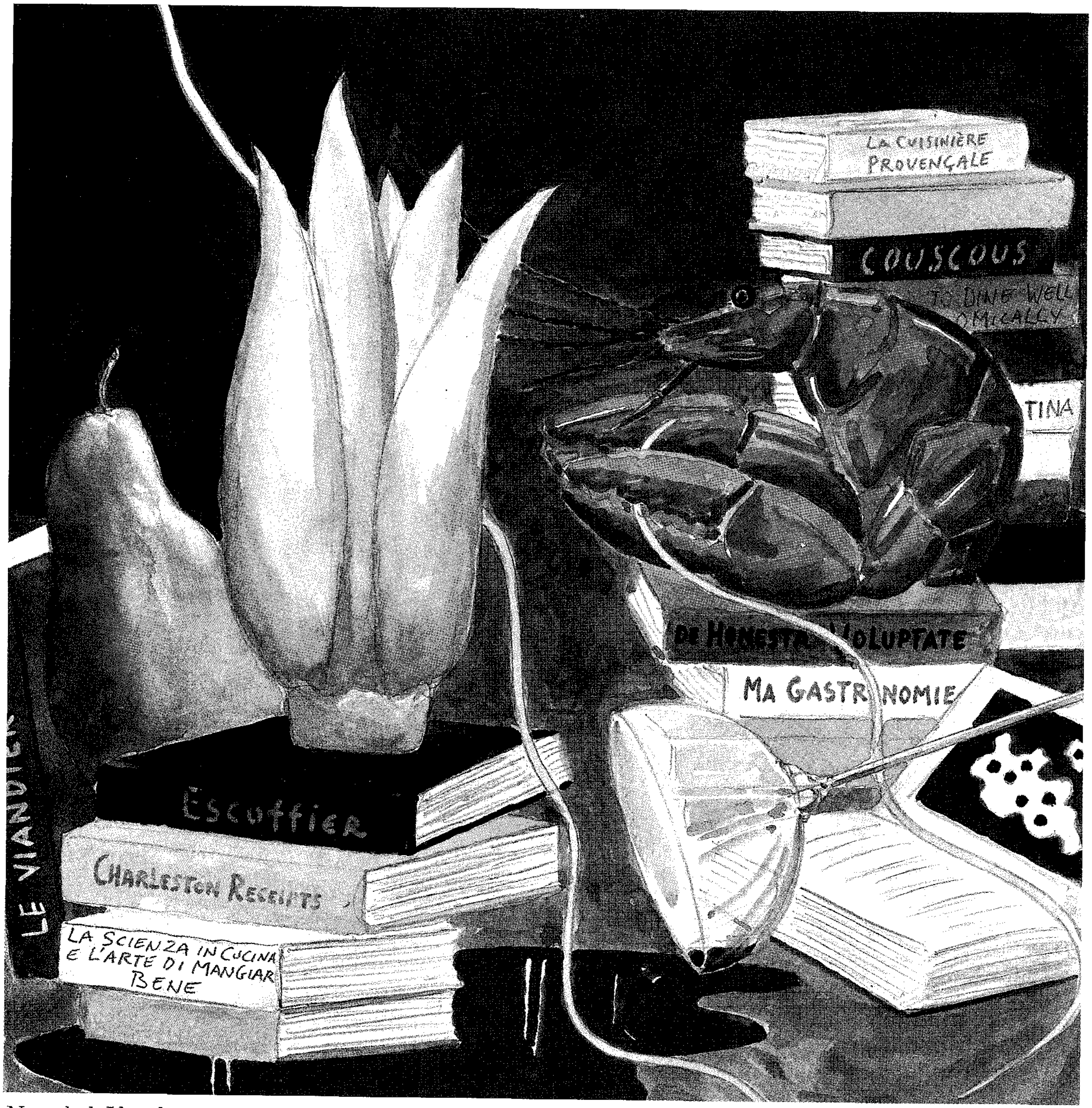
A cookbook lover in search of the perfect recipe.

BY JANE KRAMER

I read cookbooks. I am addicted to them. I keep a pile on the floor of my study in New York, knowing that if I manage to write a couple of decent pages I can treat myself to a $4.50 Chinese lunch special in the company of Richard Olney or Jasper White or Ruth Rogers and Rose Gray, thinking of all the succulent things I would cook for dinner if I didn't have to go back to work in the afternoon. I keep another pile on my bedside table, knowing that if I wake in the middle of the night I can pick one up and drift off into a soothing dream of Joël Robuchon's mashed potatoes or Claudia Roden's pumpkin dumplings or Marcella Hazan's red-and-green polenta torta, with a layer of onions, pine nuts, and ground pork between the spinach and the tomato. In my kitchen dreams, there are no crises. My books preclude them. The leg of lamb is never withering in the oven, waiting for a late guest. The chicken pot pie never collapses under the tug of its own crust. And I have sous-chefs—I think of them as husbands—standing quietly behind me, ready to shuck the oysters, stir the cornmeal, pit the olives, pound the pesto, grind the achiote, whisk the sabayon, or, at a nod, fly to my side, like angels, bearing sieves and spoons and spatulas, Thai fish pastes and fresh banana leaves and rare Indonesian spices and thick French pots so well calibrated that the butter browns without turning into cinders. My own husband, who is an anthropologist, finds my passion for cookbooks peculiar, something on the order of my addiction to thrillers and crossword puzzles. When we were first married, he would leave a copy of the "Tractatus" on my pillow, hoping that Wittgenstein would cure me. But Wittgenstein, of course, kept me up worrying about reality. My cookbooks are more like the lipsticks I used to buy as a tenth grader in a Quaker school where not even hair ribbons or colored shoelaces were permitted. They promise to transform me.

Some fifteen hundred cookbooks are published in America each year, and Americans buy them by the millions—no one knows exactly how many. Barbara Haber, who was the curator of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, at Harvard, for thirty years—and, in the process, invented the history of women and food—once told me that the sales figures for cookbooks are one of the real mysteries of the publishing business, perhaps because small presses with a cookbook or two in their catalogues don't always report those figures separately. But one thing seems clear: the only people who can touch us, when it comes to writing and buying cookbooks, are the British, and they are only just beginning to catch up. Until a few years ago, not even the French were much interested in cookbooks. The great professional chefs inherited the old French classics, but a Parisian bride, say, could expect to find one good copy of Escoffier, from a godmother or an aunt, among the wedding presents (brides in the South got "La Cuisinière Provençale," known in France as "that yellow book" because of its shiny yellow cover). And, for her kitchen, that amounted to the canon. Italians rarely admitted to buying cookbooks or, for that matter, to consulting the classics that were their—and their mothers' and grandmothers'—wedding presents. Those books had names like "Il Talismano della Felicità," or "La Scienza in Cucina e l'Arte di Mangiar Bene," which was written in the eighteen-nineties, and includes, in its section on *dolci*, a recipe for a Roman pudding said to be as "seignorial" in its pleasures as the puddings from Turin or Florence. (I think of those books as Italian versions of the Christian-housewife marriage manuals that used to advise women to greet their husband at the door at night wearing a black lace teddy and carrying a shaker of cold Martinis.)

But Americans have been buying cookbooks since the eighteenth century, and by now it seems as if half the people who ever read one eventually write their own. There are more new cookbooks in my local Barnes & Noble than there are new biographies or novels. There are seventeen thousand cookbooks listed on Amazon.com; sixteen thousand cookbooks in Barbara Haber's archives; and at least ten thousand in the splendid collection at the New York Academy of Medicine. More to the point, there are twelve thousand titles (not counting the used books) in stock right now at my favorite bookstore—the small, scholarly warren on the upper reaches of Lexington Avenue called Kitchen Arts & Letters. It has to be said that Kitchen Arts's cookbooks go back to a facsimile of a Mesopotamian cookbook in cuneiform on clay, and that Nach Waxman, who owns the store, is more likely to be reading up on the sixteenth-century Hindu shastra called the "Supa Shastra," which "treats of the arts of cookery and the properties of food," than settling into an armchair with the new Batali. In fact, his perennial best-seller isn't even a cookbook; it is a book called "On Food and Cooking," by Harold McGee, which involves a lot of biology and chemistry, and not a single recipe. Every man I know who cooks seriously owns McGee, but I am less interested in how things work than in how they taste and whether they taste perfect. And never



Not only do I keep buying cookbooks, I usually cook with three or four of them on my kitchen counter.

BENOÎT VAN INNIS

mind the theories that would have me the victim of some late-capitalist delusion that it's possible—indeed, my American birthright—to put a purchase on perfection, or even of some embarrassing religion of self-improvement. It is *my* theory that American women started reading cookbooks because they had left their mothers behind in Europe and never "received" the wisdom that is said to be passed spontaneously from generation to generation, like the gift of prophecy, in the family kitchen. My mother could not cook. She had no interest in cooking, making her about as helpful for my culinary purposes as a mother I would have had to cross the Atlantic to ask, say, if it was all right to substitute Port for Madeira in the sauce for ham on a bed of spinach. Nor could my grandmother cook. I set up housekeeping without benefit of one of those frayed looseleaf notebooks or little black file boxes, filled with cards, that grandmothers supposedly gave to mothers and mothers copied for their daughters. What's more, I had married a graduate student—which is to say that we had no money for the Cordon Bleu. I learned to cook from cookbooks.

I bought my first cookbook on fieldwork in Morocco, mainly because I needed a recipe for *ras el hanout*, the spice mixture I use in couscous, that wasn't like my friends' recipes—laced with hashish. (This was the late sixties.) My next cookbooks were the two volumes of "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," written by Julia Child, Simone Beck, and (for the first volume) Louisette Bertholle, but quickly known to the world of would-be sixties and seventies cooks as "Julia." And the first important dinner I made from them was beef Wellington. This took me two and a half days, owing, among other things, to the fact that my kitchen was so small then that I had to scrub the hall floor in order to roll out the dough for the *pain brioché* after each rising. (There were two.) I made the beef Wellington for my husband in an effort to dazzle, or perhaps to convince him that, despite all evidence to the contrary, I was a doting, domestic sort of person, a woman who squeezed oranges in the morning and wrote discreetly in the afternoon while the foie gras softened and the dough rose. (About twenty years later, he said, “I was just wondering, why don’t we have beef Wellington anymore?”)

It wasn’t long before I persuaded my mother that I could not survive without the “Larousse Gastronomique” for Christmas, and talked my Aunt Beatrice—who was just learning to cook herself and fed us chicken with rosemary and crème fraîche every Sunday—into handing over her new *Gourmet* cookbooks, two massive volumes in grainy brown bindings that turned out to be as grave and useless as a Britannica yearbook. I don’t remember ever opening the “Larousse,” but I did make a sweet-potato-and-walnut casserole from one of those old *Gourmets*, and never consulted them again. My addiction to cookbooks properly began a few years later, when I made a pilgrimage to Vienne to eat at Fernand Point’s restaurant, La Pyramide. Point was the greatest French chef of his generation, and his widow had kept the restaurant open in tribute to what he had always referred to, modestly, as “*ma gastronomie.*” He had written one cookbook, and that, of course, became the title. The book, which I bought that night, was short, gracious, and taught me two extremely important things about cooking. The first was how much I didn’t know—nap your lobster with a *sauce à l’américaine*, it said, but what was a *sauce à l’américaine*, and how did you make it, and was it really American? (Or was it Breton?) The second was not to be frightened of what I didn’t know, because if making a *sauce à l’américaine* was so simple that, from the point of view of Fernand Point, it didn’t even merit a recipe, then surely I could make one. Not exactly. It took me seven years and, of course, a cookbook. The book was “The Saucier’s Apprentice,” the author was Raymond Sokolov, and the recipes were so satisfyingly complex that even Simone Beck, a notorious French snob when it came to Americans cooking, had been forced to admit, “This would be a useful book even in France.” I made the sauce in two days of hard labor, preceded by a day of collecting veal and chicken bones from half a dozen butchers and calling neighbors who might be willing to drop by and kill an angry lobster with a chopping knife. But it was a sauce worthy of Fernand Point, and I had been determined to produce one. By now, I own more than a hundred cookbooks, and I am determined one day to turn a few plump oysters and some tapioca poached in cream, buried in sabayon, and topped with caviar into a dish worthy of Thomas Keller, whose “French Laundry Cookbook” actually tells you how to do this if you happen to have six hands.

LITTLE BOY

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For one and a half anyone in that bar will marry you,
    marry you.
The daughter of the ruling class will piss upon your palm.
Her horse is America and you have your certain, broken
    destiny.

For a quarter somebody shows up with a briefcase, baggy
    baggy.
Everybody salivates and rifles through his wallet.
Then the bowed heads are like cattle through the wire fence
    feeding.
Then, heads thrown back, we feel love for our mothers.
Then the hard hands of our fathers are washed clean
    of dirt.

There is a cloud, there is, I could take you there now,
    I could.
Do you want to see this really amazing place with me?
There the honeybee is free of the robber.
Here the robber roams, hungry, in the dawn;
there, after a little catnap, we snip old magazine ads.

—*Dan Chiasson*

I feel a certain affinity for Thomas Keller, despite the fact that he is the best chef in America (his “oysters and pearls” and his parsnip soup are hands down the best things I have ever eaten) and has real sous-chefs, and I am merely one of the two best cooks—my friend Juliet Taylor is the other—on the fourth floor of a Central Park West apartment house. We share a weakness for lobster rolls, Reuben sandwiches, hamburger joints, and Fernand Point. “So genuine, so generous, so hospitable” is the way Keller describes “Ma Gastronomie,” which he first read at the age of twenty, working for a classical French chef at a Narragansett beach club whose members, if my childhood memories serve, usually sat down to dinner three sheets to the wind and unlikely to taste the difference between a homemade demi-glace and a can of College Inn. I met Keller in May at his New York restaurant, Per Se, toward the beginning of what I am reluctant to call research. I wanted to talk to cooks who read cookbooks all the time, and to cooks who hated cookbooks, or claimed to. I had already discovered that a couple I know in Los Angeles read cookbooks aloud to each other in bed, as part of what could be called their amatory ritual; and that another couple, in Berlin, nearly divorced over an argument about which cookbooks to pack for a year in Cambridge; and that a friend in New York got headaches just by looking at the teaspoon measurements for thyme and garlic in a coq au vin. I had learned that some of my friends cooked only from recipes they had clipped from magazines and newspapers, and wouldn't touch cookbooks, and that others cooked only from hardcover books and wouldn't even touch a paperback, let alone a page torn from the Wednesday food supplement of the *Times*. Now I wanted to know if the people who cooked for a living, and whose food I loved, read cookbooks. Keller reads them as well as writes them. He had just bought three new cookbooks on the day we talked, and he keeps the classics in his restaurant kitchens, "for sous-chefs looking for inspiration." Not many of the great chefs admit to buying three cookbooks on their way to work, especially other chefs' cookbooks.

Keller began cooking mainly because his mother—who ran restaurants but whose culinary genes started and stopped at "spaghetti and onions tossed with cottage cheese"—handed him an apron when her cook got sick. (A few days later, I was pleased to learn that the mother of Judith Jones, the Knopf editor who had brought me Julia Child, Marcella Hazan, Madhur Jaffrey, and Irene Kuo, was no better at the stove than mine or Keller's; she owned one copy of "Fannie Farmer," and had a bluestocking's horror of garlic.) Keller had never really read a cookbook before he drove to Narragansett, hoping to find a job that would float him through a season of America's Cup partying in Newport. He met his mentor, Roland Henin, on Narragansett Beach, and he says that what he admired most about Henin then was less his stock reductions than the fact that "he was six foot four, French, in his thirties, and had a great-looking girlfriend and his own jeep."

Jacques Lameloise, the Burgundian chef, tells a French provincial version of the same story. He started cooking only because his older brother, who was expected to take over the family restaurant and its three Michelin stars, got smart and went off to college and was soon running a business of seven hundred people. Jacques, however, hated school. What he liked was hanging around Chagny and playing soccer, and so, *faute de mieux*, the family consigned him to its famous kitchen. "At first, I cooked like I played *foot*," he told me when I stopped at Lameloise, in June, to pick up his cookbook and treat myself to his *poitrine de pigeonneau rôti à l'émiettée de truffes, parmentier de bétilles*—something I wouldn't dream of attempting myself, though, of course, I have the recipe. "There was no sacred flame. It was simply a matter of learning that if you're going to cook it's better to love cooking and to cook well. This idea of genius is overblown." Lameloise rarely admits to reading cookbooks. Why would I do that? was the look he gave me when I asked. "What I adore is simple things," he said. "For lunch at home, I will make a lobster salad, then frog's legs, sautéed the way my father made them, then a *côte de boeuf*, then a crème caramel. Simple!"

When I saw Frank Stitt, the Birmingham restaurateur who wrote the cookbook "Southern Table," he told me that his recipe for squab—my favorite, with grits and a bourbon red-eye gravy—was "inspired" by eating at local diners where tired truckers would stop for a wake-up meal drenched in ham fat and coffee dregs. "It's the playful takeoffs I do best," he said, when I told him how much I loved that recipe, if not those last few minutes at the stove, known in the trade as "the assembly," when everything is supposed to come together. Stitt's first good cookbook was Richard Olney's "Simple French Food," and he bought it while he was studying philosophy at Berkeley and volunteering in Alice Waters's kitchen, at Chez Panisse. A few days later, he bought his second Olney, and after that it seemed quite reasonable to call his parents, in Birmingham, to say he was quitting school in the second semester of his senior year to cook. Eventually, he went to Provence to work with Olney, who was famously misogynistic and fired Stitt after his girlfriend "started dropping in with a suitcase." Today, Stitt reads food histories and old cookbooks. "Charles-

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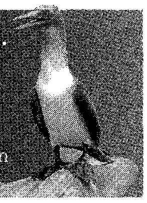

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ton Receipts." The old Delmonico's cookbook. Compilations of New Orleans recipes from the nineteenth century. Not that he keeps them at his restaurants, though he will sometimes cut out a picture from one of Alain Ducasse's cookbooks—"things like how to cut a lemon"—and show it to his staff. "Remember, most of my staff have never eaten in a great restaurant," he told me. "So I'm more like a coach to them, or a team leader. I go to the market, see the food, and I click in. The dish comes to me, like a thought to an idiot savant, and I show them how to make it. I am totally unlike, say, Ferran Adria at El Bulli"—Adria being the Spanish chef with the gadget that turns everything to foam, and whose own cookbook, which comes with a CD, will set you back three hundred and fifty dollars, plus the price of a laptop for the kitchen.

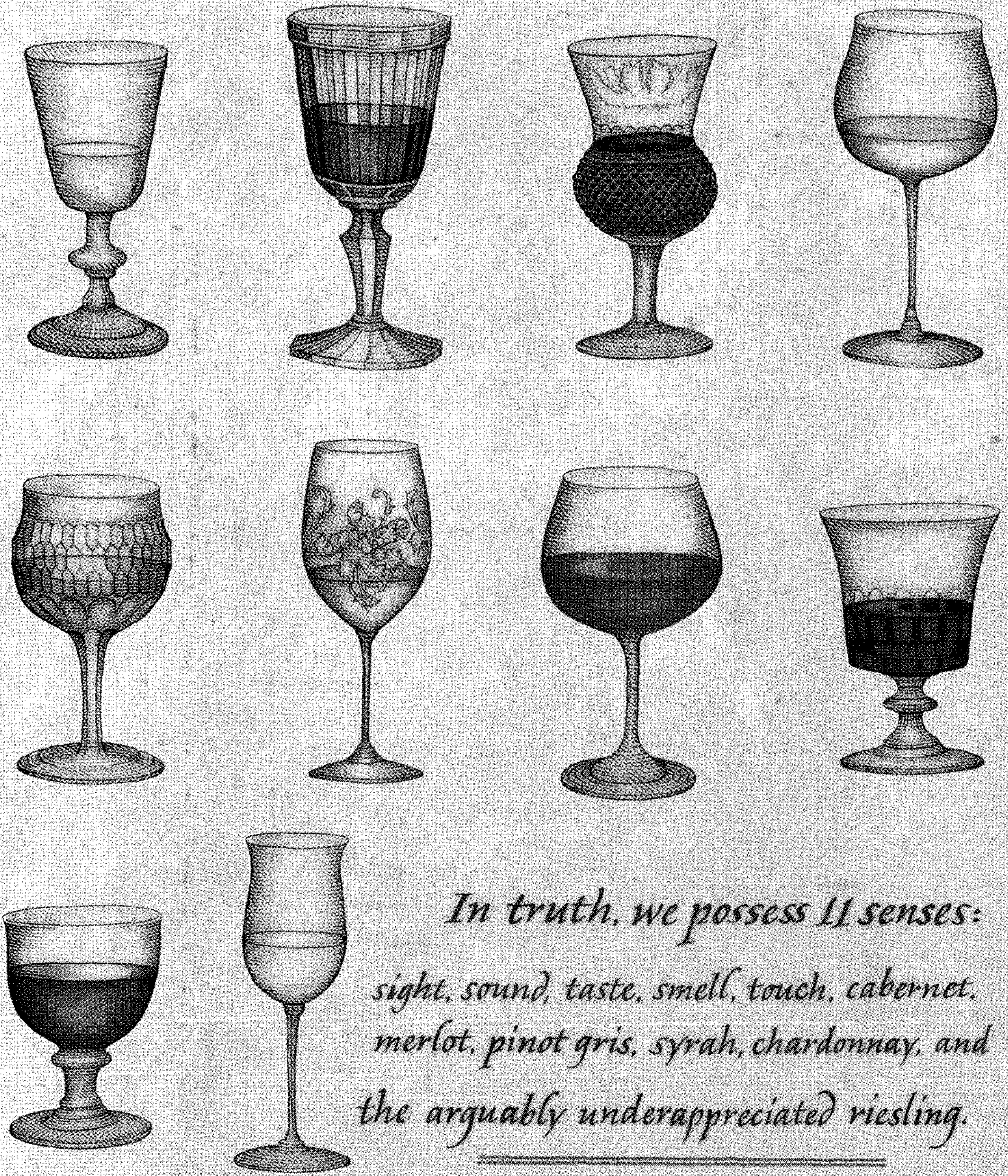
I divide my cookbooks into two categories: the ones I'm not worried about getting dirty—about spilling sauce or spattering fat on the best pages—and the ones like Keller's, which I tend to think of as coffee-table books, not only because of their size and their gloss and their four-color illustrations but because they seem to have replaced art books as the status offerings you find casually stacked in front of the couch in Manhattan living rooms. I don't keep cookbooks in the living room, but I treat them cautiously, like a new silk shirt that hangs in the closet for a month before I give in, risk the inevitable spot, and actually put it on. It took me at least a month, more like two, to move Keller onto my kitchen counter, ready for its first splotch and for the careless company of the books I think of as my workhorse cookbooks—homely, tattered affairs with awkward drawings of hands folding ravioli and boning capons.

In Paris this summer, I visited the French-cookbook historians Mary and Philip Hyman, who were hard at work on an "Oxford Companion to French Food," and learned that there was nothing new about coffee-table cookbooks. The Hymans had shown me a few of the sixteenth-century workhorses from their collection—recipes lifted from the court classics and sold by street peddlers as soon as there were customers literate enough to read them—and those books were plain little things, like penny dreadfuls, no bigger than four or five inches, that could be carried home in a pocket or a small purse. Then they showed me the books they called the "here's what's happening at the table where you'll never be allowed to sit" cookbooks—the ones that probably never saw a kitchen. They lived in the libraries of the new rich, gold-tooled and bound in Moroccan leather, alongside the Virgil and the Voltaire and the folders of Veronese prints and the first editions of Diderot's encyclopedia. There was Taillevent's "Le Viandier," written in the fourteenth century for Charles V and considered by the French to be the first major cookbook in Europe since Apicius; and La Varenne's seventeenth-century "Le Cuisinier François," which, according to the Hymans, marked the beginning of modern cooking; and Vincent La Chapelle's eighteenth-century "Le Cuisinier Moderne," in five volumes, written with a certain amount of borrowing from other chefs and filled with engravings of spectacular serving dishes and foldouts of table settings for a hundred guests.

"Not many lemmings survive the experience, let alone write a book about it."

There wasn't a woman among the writing royal chefs, which may be why none of their books looked used. But by the nineteenth century, when many of those chefs had been reduced to opening restaurants or cooking family dinners in the kitchens of the bourgeoisie, some of them looked to the future and took to writing profitable, practical cookbooks—cookbooks for housewives—although their shame was such that they often published under women's names. Hence the irresistible Tabitha Tickletooth, an "Englishwoman" whose book was published under the title "The Dinner Question, or How to Dine Well and Economically." ("Economically" was not a word likely to burnish the reputation of a male chef de cuisine, moonlighting from a precarious job at an English castle.) The women who actually did write cookbooks then were not important chefs. I like to think of those women as more like me: women who read cookbooks and learned to cook that way. The Americans among them often simply collected recipes from European books and translated them, adding a bit of cautionary down-home commentary. I own a tiny edition of Miss Leslie's "Domestic French Cooking," which was published in Philadelphia in 1832 and stayed in print for the next quarter century, and which I cherish for its recipe for oyster stuffing and its maidenly shudder at the voluptuary French practice of fattening geese.

Authentic American cooking, in all its regional variety and ethnic influences, really came into its own when women's groups—book clubs, church groups, suffrage groups, daughters-of-this-or-that groups—started put-



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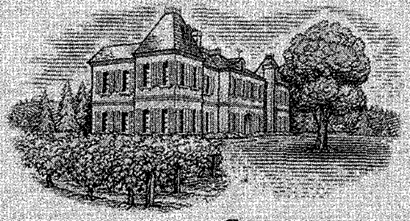

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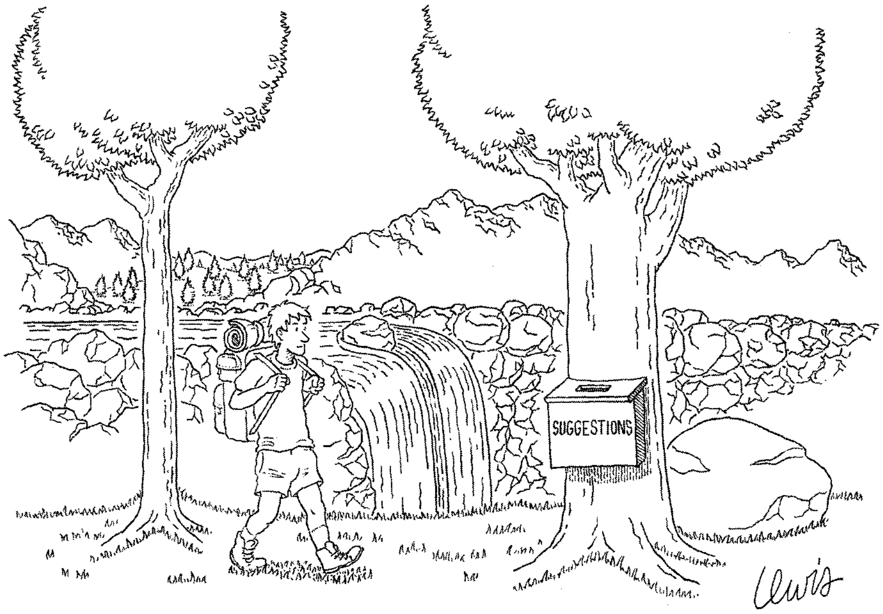

ting together "community cookbooks." Community cookbooks are a purely American phenomenon. They began to appear during the Civil War, written by housewives, North and South, who contributed their best and hitherto secret recipes, published them locally on a shoestring, and sold them to raise money for the home-town troops. And they outlasted the war by at least a century, because, for one thing, everyone covets a recipe so good that generations of your neighbor's family have refused to share it, and because, for another, they carried the imprimatur of charity and were considered a respectable womanly pursuit—not likely to produce a bonneted Martha Stewart, abandoning hearth and husband for fame and fortune in the big city. (I like to think that Miss Leslie, whose name was Eliza Leslie, assumed her literary "Miss" in order to reassure her readers that she was not sitting at a desk, neglecting some man's hard-earned household.) Community cookbooks still account for about half the American cookbooks published, though the ones you find in bookstores now are mainly regional or ethnic cookbooks, not charity books, and the women who put them together, and even the women who contribute recipes, usually want to make a few dollars for themselves. And why not? Charity aside, Mrs. Clarence W. Miles, who contributed "tomatoes brown" to the cookbook "Maryland's Way"—tomatoes brown are tomatoes stewed for hours in brown sugar, and they make a gooey treat—deserved to be collecting royalties.

It occurs to me now, sitting in a farmhouse in Umbria, surrounded by thirty new cookbooks recommended by my daughter—a screenwriter and fellow cookbook addict—and wondering when to start dinner, that there is a strong connection between women who write and women who cook and who love recipes. This is something anyone who has read "To the Lighthouse" knows. It is impossible to follow Mrs. Ramsay through her vegetable garden and into the kitchen for that long braising of the *boeuf en daube* and doubt that Virginia Woolf read cookbooks, though she was too crafty to say so. It is, however, possible to sit through twenty or thirty of Trollope's Sunday dinners and never know how the roast got to the table. Henry James never taught me how the Florentines made pasta, Proust never taught me how the cooks in Combray made madeleines, and I don't remember that Flaubert even mentioned what Emma Bovary made for the doctor on the maid's day off, let alone how she cooked it. I know how Hemingway grilled the fish he caught, but nothing about how he sauced them, or what he did for dessert. I do, however, know what Rachel Samstat cooked in Nora

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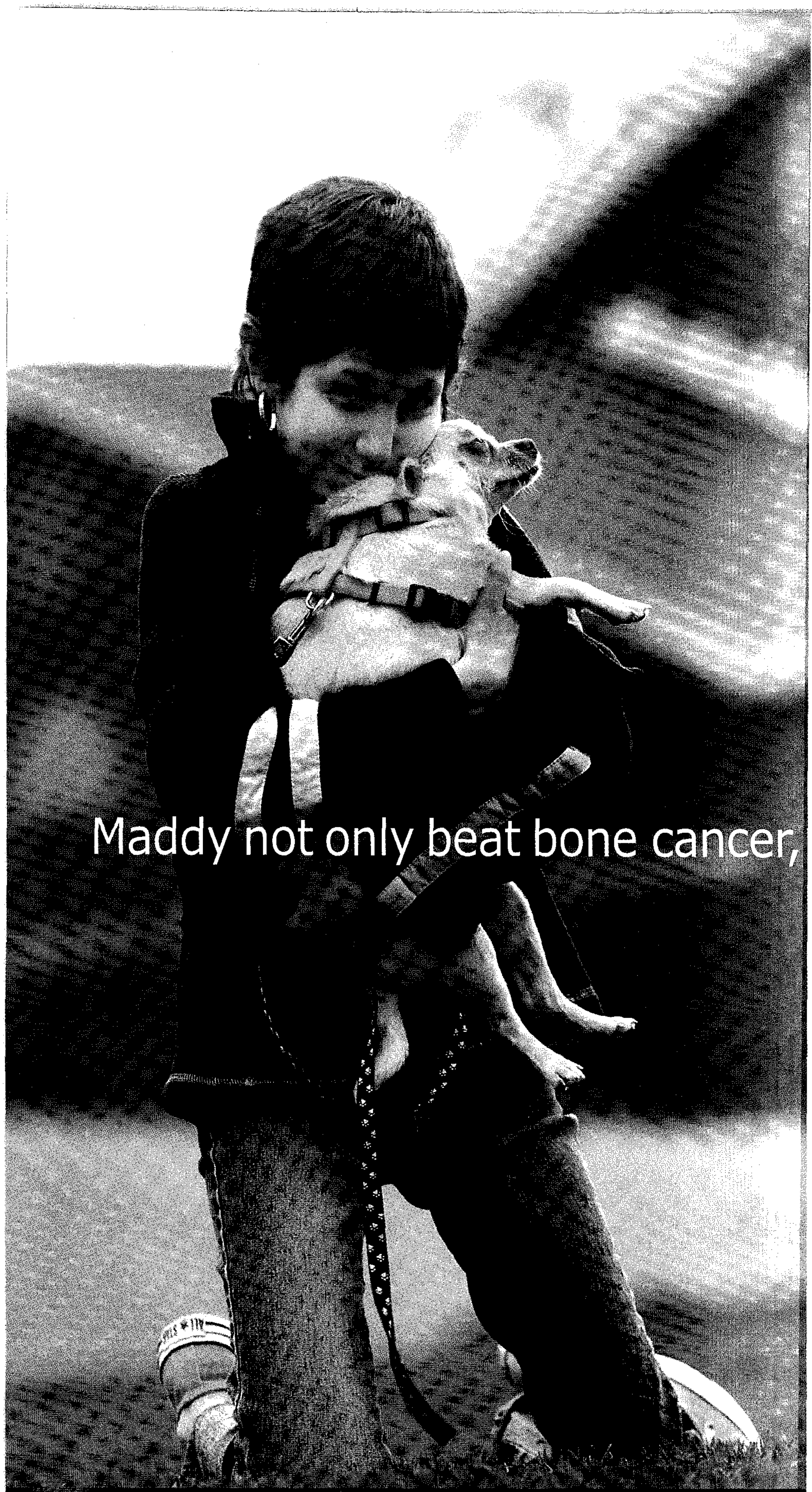

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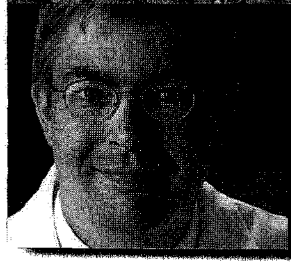

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Ephron's roman à clef "Heartburn," because the novel is full of recipes, surely making it the only saga to emerge from Deep Throat Washington whose revelations involve a stove. The list is long. Patrizia Chen's lovely Italian memoir "Rosemary and Bitter Oranges" sent me straight to the kitchen with recipes for Livornese fish soup and lemon tea cake. Even Frances Mayes—whose ubiquitous memoir "Under the Tuscan Sun" has two chapters of recipes—started cooking as a young poet, which may account for some of the poetic license in those recipes; I have yet to read a real Tuscan cookbook or enter a Tuscan kitchen where the olive oil was so often replaced by butter and heavy cream.

Maybe I am an anxious cook, like the woman who famously botched a recipe for "green onions" which she had taken so literally as to throw away all the white parts of her scallions. Not only do I keep buying cookbooks, I usually cook with three or four of them on my kitchen counter, open to different recipes for the same dish. But that is nothing compared with my psychoanalyst friend J. J. Dayle, who cooks from more than two hundred cookbooks, subscribes to (among other things) *Cook's Illustrated*, *Saveur*, and *The Rosengarten Report*, and stocks forty kinds of sea salt in his kitchen. J. J. Dayle is not his real name, but it's the name he is planning to use when he writes *his* cookbook, so that his patients won't associate their gentle shrink with the man who refers to a great therapy as "like a great dish—something you know, in the first five minutes, where it's going." J.J. once drove down the Mediterranean coast sampling the fish soup in every town, and he describes his own bouillabaisse by crying, "I am Samson Agonistes with my soups! God damn it, I have to wrestle them to the floor."

I was quite comforted by J.J.'s quest for the perfect fish soup. It reminded me of my quest for the perfect *sauce à l'américaine*. Usually, I try to avoid quests. Like most cookbook addicts, I buy a book, read it, and, if I'm lucky, find a couple of recipes that sound right, and forget the rest. I can always locate those recipes, because my books fall open to the pages I cook from most, and after ten or twenty years they even fall apart at those pages—which I find convenient. My old "Joy of Cooking" is split at the Bulgarian cucumber soup and again at the fruit preserves; my Craig Claiborne at the Yorkshire pudding; my "Silver Palate" at the salmon mousse; my "Julia" at the *choucroute garnie;* my Madhur Jaffrey at the shrimp curry with the best spices. This is something I wait for—the spine of my first River Café cookbook is just beginning to go, at the zucchini soup and at the *penne alla carbonara*—the way I wait for splotches. (My latest splotches are on the Circassian chicken in Roden's "Picnic" and on the boneless chicken breasts with lemon and capers in "Southern Table.") But certain recipes elude me, and I go on quests. A few weeks ago, I almost went on a quest for calamari sauce. I had stopped at a small restaurant on the Lago di Garda called Nuovo Ponte, eaten a wonderfully inky pasta with calamari sauce, and asked the chef, Fiorenzo Andreoli, for the recipe. He wasn't at all surprised. He had once spent two years in San Francisco, working for an old friend with an Italian restaurant, and he said that the thing he remembered most—the one thing that always made him smile when he met an American—was how everyone in the kitchen besides himself and his friend "cooked with his nose in a cookbook." He told me that his calamari sauce "just came to me when I started cooking, because this is how calamari sauce is made on the Lago di Garda." A little *aglio*, a little *olio*, a little *basilico*, he said, when I asked if he couldn't be more precise.

I don't usually cook from books in Italy; my garden tells me what to eat and the butcher tells me what he's got, and I go from there. (Call it a vacation; to me, it's cold turkey.) But this summer I packed up my new cookbooks and sent them off—and was quite lucky to receive them, inasmuch as they disappeared for ten days and had to be dug out of the customs shed at the Milan airport, where they were held for commercial duty on the ground (roughly translated) that "no one person has that many cookbooks." I think it was also the exotic titles—"Lulu's Provençal Table," "Couscous," "Savoring the Spice Coast of India," "The Key to Chinese Cooking," "Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet." Italians have no interest in foreign food, and as

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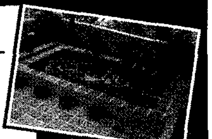

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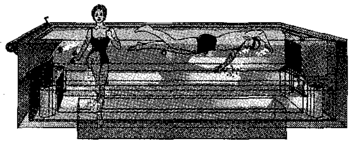

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for their own food—a lot of my new books were Italian—it is considered an insult not only to your mother's kitchen but to your mother herself to suggest that anyone else's mother may have cooked better.

In the event, it was impossible to find any of the things I needed to savor the coast of India or make a proper couscous (for one thing, Umbrians do not eat turnips) or to unlock the door to Chinese cooking. In Italy, it is even impossible to sit down to a Provençal table. The one time I tried—I served braised rabbit on a bed of noodles to some Roman neighbors—they said, "Pasta is for before the meat," and scraped the noodles off their plates. (On their last visit, they arrived with a new black garbage pail as a house gift.) Italians today are arguably more broad-minded than they were in the fifteenth century, when a food-loving papal secretary named Bartolomeo Sacchi was thrown in jail by Pope Paul II as a "sectarian of Epicurus." (Under a nicer Pope, and using the pseudonym Platina, he produced the legendary cookbook "De Honesta Voluptate.") But they do not willingly eat anybody else's food.

The quest I am on right now is for the perfect pot-au-feu—which is to say, a pot-au-feu as good as the one I ate this Easter, in New York, at the house of my friend Susannna Lea. Susanna is an English vegetarian who never cooks, so it stands to reason that she did not have a great recipe for pot-au-feu at her fingertips or, indeed, any interest at all in pot-au-feu. But she is also a Paris literary agent married to a French writer and, having moved to New York last fall, they wanted to serve something ur-French at Easter to their American friends. Susanna's pot-au-feu was, in fact, a kind of long-distance literary collaboration between three cookbooks she had bought for the occasion—Patricia Wells's "Bistro Cooking," Anthony Bourdain's "Les Halles Cookbook," and Guy Savoy's "Simple French Recipes for the Home Cook"—and one of her Paris clients, a novelist named Marc Levy whose first book, a romance involving a lonely architect and a young woman in a coma, sold so many millions of copies that he went out and bought a six-burner Gaggenau stove and grill and a couple of Gaggenau ovens and started "reflecting," as he told me himself a few months later, on reinventing pot-au-feu. His version takes at least two days, and he had walked Susanna through it by telephone, starting early on the morning of Good Friday and ending at noon on Sunday. It was very fussy. It involved not only hours of braising—not to mention of steaming vegetables, one by one, over meat broth; poaching marrow bones wrapped in tinfoil; and making a vinaigrette with riced eggs and capers—but also a hunt for beef cheeks, which are not easy to come by if you live in New York, where the only people who sell them are wholesale butchers and you have to buy them in frozen blocks of thirty pounds. Susanna had to give up on beef cheeks, but, even so, the work was worth it. I copied the recipe from the back of an old manuscript envelope by the phone on her kitchen counter. My quest began there.

I now own twenty-two recipes for pot-au-feu, if you count the Italian versions of *bollito misto*, and am halfway through the biography of a Paris film-world hostess whose own recipe was so renowned that the book is called "Le Pot-au-Feu de Mary Meerson." What I am really doing is waiting for fall, because it is much too hot in Umbria to cook a pot-au-feu and, anyway, my butcher, who is hard put even to cut a chicken into four pieces, has never heard of anyone eating beef cheeks. He says it is "not Italian." (He means not within shouting distance of his own shop.) So I am concentrating on calamari, and if I succeed tonight I will not look at another cookbook until I am back in New York, making "oysters and pearls." My husband has offered to do the cooking while I recover. He is (his word) an "instinctive" cook and claims that cookbooks are a waste of time. He goes to the fish store, picks what's fresh, and makes it in fifteen minutes. It may be that the best recipe I ever got came from M. Picot, the *patron* of Le Voltaire, my favorite Paris restaurant. I was there in June, and ordered a sole meunière that was so buttery and delicious that I asked M. Picot how he did it. He smiled wisely, and said, "*Madame, il faut choisir le poisson.*" ♦

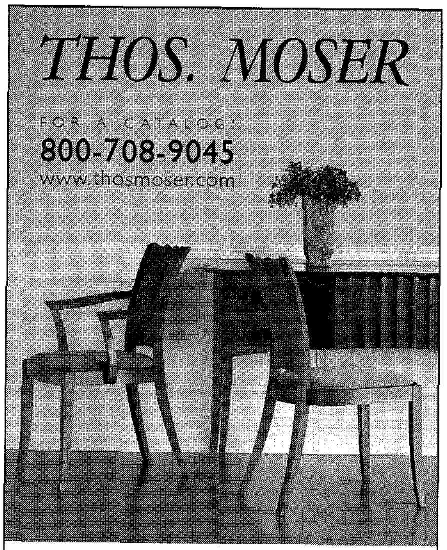
BRIEFLY NOTED

A Revolution in Eating, *by James E. McWilliams (Columbia; $29.95).* In New England, Colonial settlers ate like the British. In the West Indies, masters co-opted the culinary habits of their slaves. Between the two, in the middle states, catchall dishes were the staple. McWilliams's examination of the culinary history of Colonial America is more than a region-by-region gastronomic tour; it's a sociological look at how the demands of the land, the economy, and regional and ethnic interactions influenced and were influenced by food. If the book does not quite live up to the ambitions of its subtitle ("How the Quest for Food Shaped America"), it is still a lively and informative read. McWilliams is at his best when he demonstrates how British infringement on the settlers' autonomy in the years preceding the Revolutionary War was an affront to America's material—and culinary—independence. Farming, as Thomas Jefferson maintained, wasn't simply a tool; it was an ethic. The fruits of a man's labors are his own.

Pig Perfect, *by Peter Kaminsky (Hyperion; $22).* In this memoirish account of pork production and consumption, the self-described "hamthropologist" Peter Kaminsky searches for the perfect swine. Cherishing memories of his grandma's boiled ham, Kaminsky travels extensively, from the foothills of the Pyrenees to rural Missouri. He examines pigs from historical, religious, and ecological viewpoints, veering into impassioned, if rudimentary, discussions of their role in everything from sustainable agriculture to evolution. The characters he encounters along the way, among them a dark-haired Kentucky beauty who holds the secret to pork mold and a champion pig-cutter from Spain, are the book's heroes. Kaminsky writes with the authority of an obsessive and a humor that occasionally strays into winsomeness; in his acknowledgments, he thanks "all the pigs who gave their last full measure in the service of gastronomy."

The Perfect Egg, *by Aldo Buzzi, translated from the Italian by Guido Waldman (Bloomsbury; $16.95).* This collection of ruminations on cuisine and cookery offers the perspective of a refined palate wed to a lively intellect. Buzzi expounds upon the olla podrida beloved by Sancho Panza in "Don Quixote" (the ancient Greek precursor of which had a name a hundred and eighty-four letters long) and ponders Kafka's eating habits, noting that his Czech name means "crow," a bird that makes a fine soup. Illustrations by Saul Steinberg are fittingly whimsical: a lunch menu that includes a dental chart; a place setting made up of a hammer, pliers, and screwdriver. Examples of Buzzi's urbane culinary style can be found throughout the book. A recipe for *picula ad caval* (horsemeat stew) concludes, "A distant, almost imperceptible whinny will warn the person who is familiar with horses that the dish is now cooked."

Cooking with Fernet Branca, *by James Hamilton-Paterson (Europa; $14.95).* In this comic novel, two expats try to live on the same Tuscan mountaintop for the summer without killing each other: Gerald, an effete English snob and amateur cook who makes his living as a ghost-writer; and Marta, a bohemian composer from a crime family in a former Soviet republic. Hamilton-Paterson quickly seduces the reader with the perfectly captured acerbic tone and timing of Gerald and Marta's badinage. Secondary characters include the bald, crystal-wearing star of a British boy band and an avant-garde Italian film director (making what turns out to be high-budget pornography). The most memorable element of this inventive story, however, is Gerald's recipes, which punctuate the text; they include Mussels in Chocolate, Garlic and Fernet Branca Ice Cream, and Alien Pie, a dish made from smoked cat and a drop of kerosene, and garnished with a buzzard feather.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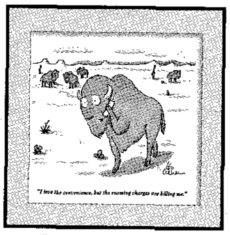
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BOOKS

PARADISES LOST

Rushdie's "Shalimar the Clown."

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Why, oh why, did Salman Rushdie, in his new novel, "Shalimar the Clown" (Random House; $25.95), call one of his major characters Maximilian Ophuls? Max Ophuls is a highly distinctive name, well known to movie lovers as that of a German-born actor and stage director who, beginning in 1930, directed films in Germany, France, Russia, Italy, the Netherlands, and, after 1946, the United States. Readers of this review will be spared, as the reviewer was not, the maddening exercise of trying to overlay Rushdie's Ophuls with the historical one. The two have no connection save the name and a peripatetic life, including a period of Los Angeles residence and a child who becomes a maker of documentary films—the real Ophuls's son, Marcel, made "The Sorrow and the Pity," and the fictional Ophuls's daughter, first called India and then called Kashmira, is the auteur of "Camino Real," a filmed trip up the West Coast along the mission-planting trail taken by Fray Junípero Serra in the seventeen-seventies. The real Ophuls was born in 1902 in Saarbrücken, near the French border in the Saar region of Germany, and died in Hamburg in 1957, after an adult life spent entirely in theatrical precincts, whereas Rushdie's imaginary Ophuls is born around 1911 in the French city of Strasbourg and dies in Los Angeles in 1991, after distinguishing himself as the United States Ambassador to India from 1965 to 1967 and afterward as the "U.S. counterterrorism chief." His daughter is told, "Your father served his country in some hot zones, he swam for America through some pretty muddy water."

Why has Rushdie attached a gaudy celebrity name to a different sort of celebrity, preventing the Ambassador from coming into sharp, living focus on his own? It is partly, perhaps, characteristic Rushdiean overflow. His novels pour by in a sparkling, voracious onrush, each wave topped with foam, each paragraph luxurious and delicious, but the net effect perilously close to stultification. His prose hops with dropped names, compulsive puns, learned allusions, winks at the reader, and repeated bows to popular culture. His plots proceed by verbal connection and elaboration as much as by character interaction. This story begins and ends in Los Angeles, so angels are on the author's mind, as two not unusually overloaded sentences demonstrate:

Salman Rushdie

> He [Fray Juan Crespi, in 1769] named the Los Angeles River after the angels of Assisi and their holy mistress and twelve years later, when a new settlement was established here, it took its title from the river's full name, becoming El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles de Porciúncula, the Town of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels of the Very Small Plot of Land. But the City of Angels now stood on a Very Large Plot of Land Indeed, thought India Ophuls, and those who dwelt there needed mightier protectors than they had been given, A-list, A-team angels, angels familiar with the violence and disorder of giant cities, butt-kicking Angeleno angels, not the small-time, underpowered, effeminate, hello-birds-hello-sky, love-and-peace, sissy-Assisi kind.

Verbal hyperactivity of the sissy-Assisi sort nudges the hip reader on page after page: "appalled by his charm, by the erotic proximity of his snappy crackle of power"; "as graceful in his movement as the incomparable Max"; "The city was a cliff and they were its stampeding lemmings. At the foot of the cliff was the valley of the broken dolls"; "He went into his blighted apple orchard, seated himself cross-legged beneath a tree, closed his eyes, heard the verses of the Rig-Veda fill the world with beauty, and ceased upon the midnight with no pain." That last pawky phrase is, of course, John Keats talking, in "Ode to a Nightingale." James Joyce and T. S. Eliot established brainy allusions as part of modernity's literary texture, but at the risk of making the author's brain the most vital presence on the page.

"A plague on both your houses" is one of the novel's two epigraphs. A studied duality gives structure to its teeming details. It sketches the ruination of two natural paradises, California and Kashmir—the former by "human bloat" in the shape of trailer parks and "the new pleasantvilles being built in the firetrap canyons to house the middle-class arrivistes" and "the less-pleasantvilles in the thick of the urban sprawl . . . the dirty underbelly of paradise," and the latter by Islamic uprising and the matched savagery of the insurgency's attempted suppression by the government of India. Another doubling, posing the conflict of the extremes within human nature, is expressed in terms of ancient Asian myth:

> There were nine grabbers in the cosmos, Surya the Sun, Soma the Moon, Budha the Mercury, Mangal the Mars, Shukra the Venus, Brihaspati the Jupiter, Shani the Saturn, and Rahu and Ketu, the two shadow planets. The shadow planets actually existed without actually existing. They were heavenly bodies without bodies. . . . "The shadow planets act upon us from a distance and focus our minds upon our instincts. Rahu is the exaggerator the intensifier! Ketu is the

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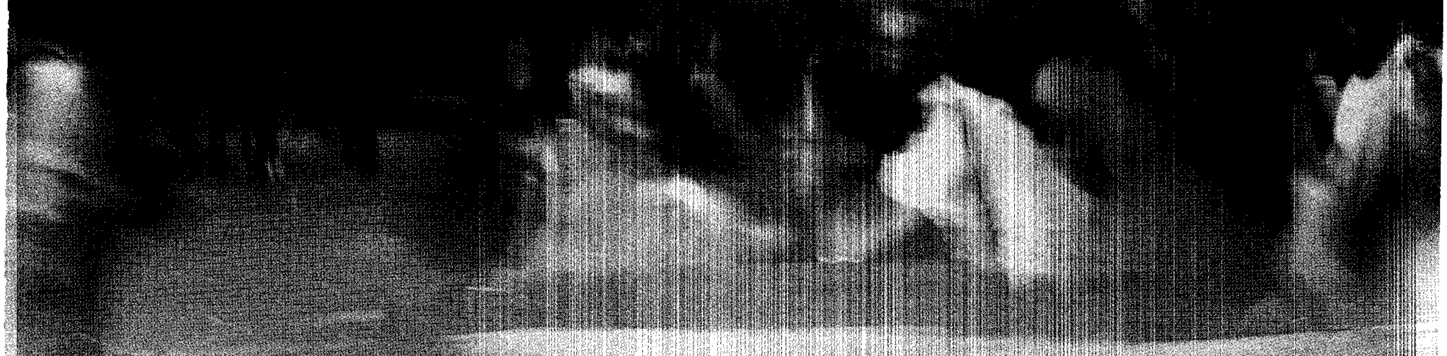

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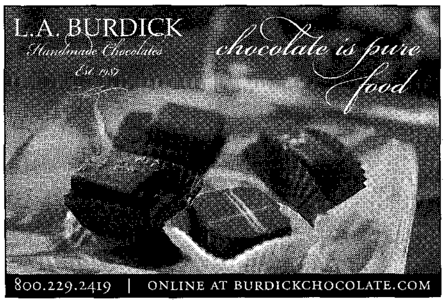
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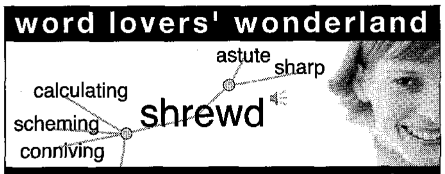
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> blocker the suppressor! The dance of the shadow planets is the dance of the struggle within us."

The speaker in quotation marks is pandit Pyarelal Kaul, a philosophy-minded Hindu widower, with a gift for cookery, who lives in the "second-best dwelling" in the Kashmiri village of Pachigam; at the opposite end of the village lives Abdullah Noman, the village's Muslim headman, "the *sarpanch*, who held them all in the palm of his hand." When, as in the Shakespeare play that calls down "a plague on both your houses," the offspring of the two families, not quite fourteen, fall in love and make love, the village council, the five-man *panchayat*, unanimously comes to a surprising decision: let them marry. "The lovers were their children and must be supported. Their behavior was worthy of the strongest censure . . . but they were good children, as everybody knew." Abdullah invokes "*Kashmiriyat*, Kashmiriness, the belief that at the heart of Kashmiri culture there was a common bond that transcended all other differences." So beautiful Boonyi Kaul, "dark as a secret, bright as happiness," and Shalimar Noman, "the most beautiful boy in the world," who is called "the clown," because he plays the comic tightrope walker in "the traditional entertainments known as *bhand panther* or clown stories," marry in a blithely mixed Hindu-Muslim ceremony.

But at the time of this auspicious outcome, in the early sixties, *Kashmiriyat* was already under siege. The subcontinental Partition of 1947 had left this northern princely state itself divided, between an Azad region controlled by Pakistan and a larger region uneasily under Delhi's rule. Kashmir had been the idyllic summer haven of the British colonials, who, in 1846, installed a Hindu ruler over a population that, after centuries of Mughal rule, was predominantly Muslim. The village tolerance and Hindu-Muslim coexistence that Gandhi had hoped would prevail in postcolonial India gave way, in Kashmir, to sectarian battles, fitfully halted by United Nations-arranged ceasefires, and to terrorism aligned with global Islam.

The novel's knowledgeable details of military and political action, and its harrowing depictions of atrocity and counteratrocity, are apt to be news to American readers, for whom, in six decades that headlined Eastern Europe, Berlin, Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East, Kashmir has been off the front page. But to Rushdie it has been a grievous personal matter. "Shalimar the Clown" is dedicated "in loving memory of my Kashmiri grandparents." Pachigam and its elders, and their dynamic and dauntless wives, and the rich array of supporting performers, and the sensations of a childhood spent in the high meadows and narrow valleys, among clear lakes and rivers of snowmelt, under the aspect of shining glaciers and timeless traditions, are evoked with an affection bestowed on few other of the novel's venues. Rushdie feels the loss of the old Kashmir so keenly that he propels his ill-named Ambassador, the usually cool and laconic Maximilian Ophuls, into uttering "a series of high-flown locutions" in a television interview, culminating in the cri de cœur "In Kashmir it is paradise itself that is falling; heaven on earth is being transformed into a living hell."

Rushdie as a literary performer suffers, I think, from being not just an author but a cause célèbre and a free-speech martyr, thanks to the fatwa issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in the wake of "The Satanic Verses" (1988), a playful work that precipitated riots in India and Pakistan, and gave American and English publishers and booksellers an early taste of heightened security. The fatwa, which invited any good Muslim to kill Rushdie, was withdrawn in 1998, but a decade of living in hiding deepened this previously gregarious author's expertise on two subjects: celebrity and human cruelty. His fascination with fame and theatricality, movies and rock music predated the fatwa, and gives his fiction a distracting glitter, like shaken tinsel. The reader squirms, a bit, at the movie-star trappings with which Rushdie cossets India Ophuls's fabulous long-legged beauty: a horde of unsatisfactory suitors, conditioning routines that include "weekly boxing sessions at Jimmy Fish's boxing club on Santa Monica and Vine where Tyson and Christy Martin were known to work out," her shooting practice "out in the desert at 29 Palms," her driving off to celebrate her birthday in her father's DeLorean, "a silver luxury speed-mobile with batwing doors." And does her father, in his farewell fling with the opposite sex, have to settle on an Indian woman, "the color of scorched earth," who turns out to be Zainab Azam, the subcontinent's "hottest box-office star . . . a sex goddess such as the Indian cinema had never seen"? Wouldn't the second-hottest box-office star have done as well, and been more plausible than such a lofty winner, in this poor world of losers stuck in less-pleasantvilles? Rushdie himself well knows, after all, what a cumbersome handicap celebrity can become, and his seeming insistence on extreme glamour for his characters limits his room for maneuver within fiction's curious democracy.

The plot of "Shalimar the Clown," beneath the tinsel and the outrage, the Hindu and Bollywood mythmaking, the jittery verbal razzmatazz, is as simple as a legend. It hinges on an impetuous vow. On the first night Shalimar and Boonyi make love, Shalimar, "rolling over onto his back and panting for joy," says:

> "Don't you leave me now, or I'll never forgive you, and I'll have my revenge, I'll kill you and if you have any children by another man I'll kill the children also."

Boonyi takes the threat lightly:

> "What a romantic you are," she replied carelessly. "You say the sweetest things."

Eventually, this young Asian wife attempts to break out of her confined and undereducated state. What she finds is another sort of confinement, whose freedoms enable her to indulge her most self-damaging proclivities. Her loving husband, meanwhile, becomes, in the service of Azad Kashmir, an embodiment of Muslim fury and vengefulness, a monomaniacal killing machine. His first assassination is thrillingly anticipated: he has a gun, but opts for a knife, "because he wanted to know what it would feel like when he placed the blade of his knife against the man's skin, when he pushed the sharp and glistening horizon of the knife against the frontier of the skin, violating the sovereignty of another human soul, moving in beyond taboo, toward the blood."

The beyond-taboo moment has a counterpart in Rushdie's previous—and untidier and nakeder—novel, "Fury," when the mild, scholarly Professor Malik Solanka, while consuming, alone in the kitchen, three bottles of wine, passes through self-pity and enters "a terrible, blaming anger"; he finds himself upstairs holding a carving knife over the sleeping bodies of his wife and his four-year-old son, "on his side, curled tightly into her, sleeping the pure deep sleep of innocence and trust." Solanka then and there decides to leave them and go to New York, where violence is commonplace. Fury, it turns out, is hard to escape: in "Shalimar the Clown" we read, "Everywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer our own, individual, discrete. . . . The world was no longer calm."

In his ten years under the fatwa, Rushdie lived with the vehemence of offended Islam, and, as a fiction writer should, he absorbed the experience and found vehemence within himself. His counterattack on his Islamic persecutors is under way in such broadsides as a recent Op-Ed piece in the *Times*, "India and Pakistan's Code of Dishonor," and in fiction that animates Islam's tenacious rage with faces and life stories. His invention, in "Shalimar the Clown," of the "iron mullah," a zealot literally made of metal, is excellent caricature, and the mullah's speech inculcating warrior zealotry is awesome in its disconnection from anything the West calls civilization. Rushdie in his Manhattan retreat is no longer a Third World writer but a bard of the grim one world we all, in a state of some dread, inhabit. The novel's concluding pages conjure up the sensations of the hunter and the hunted wonderfully well, with, uncharacteristically, understatement, the mark of authority. The climactic ending, in one more cinematic allusion, suggests the most terrifying scene in "The Silence of the Lambs." This time, though, the night-vision goggles are on the eyes of Jodie Foster. ♦

EXTREME MEASURES DEPARTMENT

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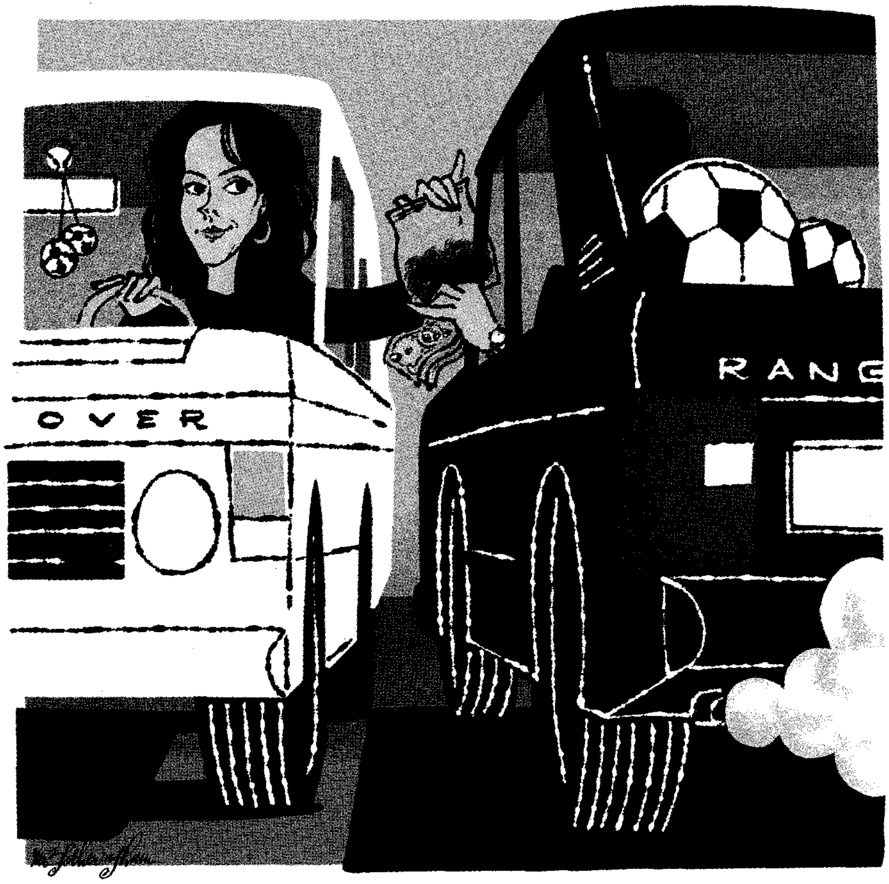
DEALING HOUSEWIVES

Potheads in paradise.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

“Weeds,” a new Showtime comedy series in which a suburban widow takes up the not very noble profession of pot-dealing after her husband drops dead, can’t be called courageous, since the premium-cable networks have little to lose when they venture into controversial territory, but it is nonetheless daring. “Weeds” actually meets the rarely fulfilled promise of Showtime’s former slogan: “No Limits.” Showtime suffers from reflexive, and mostly substantive, comparisons with HBO, but “Weeds” puts it a little closer to HBO in its asymptotic relationship with the Tiffany network of the premium-cable universe. (If, that is, such an old-school title can be applied to a channel that, in addition to “The Sopranos” and “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” offers the uncultured pearls “Cathouse” and “Real Sex.” Of course, the Tiffany network itself, CBS, was the one that sold us such gems as “The Beverly Hillbillies” and “Green Acres.” So enough of that.) “Weeds” brings to mind a number of TV shows—“Desperate Housewives” among them—as well as the movie “E.T.” Like that movie, “Weeds” is set in a soulless development that has been thrown up amid the beautiful and still stubbornly wild California hills (you can encroach on the hills, but they—their coyotes, snakes, and mountain lions—will encroach right back), and the family it revolves around consists of a single mother with children of tender years.

Until the death of her husband, Judah, who had a heart attack while he was out jogging, Nancy Botwin (Mary-Louise Parker) led a regular upper-middle-class life in a community called Agrestic, an unpretty, and misleading, word that means “rural.” (The name is a cleverly sidelong way for the show to establish its attitude toward the suburbs—the implication being that the number of these drywalled dead zones has now outstripped the supply of nice misnomers for them, such as Sylvan Hills and Sparkling Pond Farms.) In some ways, Nancy still is leading a regular life: in the show’s opening scene, she attends a school meeting and tries to persuade the other mothers there to push for the replacement of soda with bottled water and juice in the school’s vending machines. TV shows almost invariably portray school meetings as a no man’s land, with women whispering gossip to one another or becoming absurdly adamant about a minor matter affecting their own precious child. “Weeds” is no exception; this is how the show tells us both that there are dirty secrets in these California closets and that it has satirical credibility. Like most shows, “Weeds” doesn’t win any points for subtlety in this area, or in some others, including its soundtrack, which underlines every moment with all too obvious knowingness. The show’s theme song is the insufferably smug sixties folk ditty “Little Boxes,” by the protest singer Malvina Reynolds, an indictment of suburban conformity that you need to hear only once in your life, for historical purposes. It doesn’t feel good to be talked down to at the beginning of every episode of a show.



A soccer mom branches out into dope-dealing in Showtime’s new comedy.

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

Luckily, “Weeds,” which was created by Jenji Kohan, who also wrote almost half the episodes (her first name sounds almost like a slang term for marijuana), is better than its theme song. And dramatically it does take us into some unexpected places. In that opening scene, Nancy, instead of breaking down upon realizing that she’s the subject of gossip, or cracking under the strain of new widowhood, holds her own against the chattering asses and against Celia (Elizabeth Perkins), another mother who has a strong opinion on the soda question. Nancy does break down toward the end of the first episode, but the timing of the scene is a surprise and the moment is brief. This character is less trembly and vulnerable than the ones

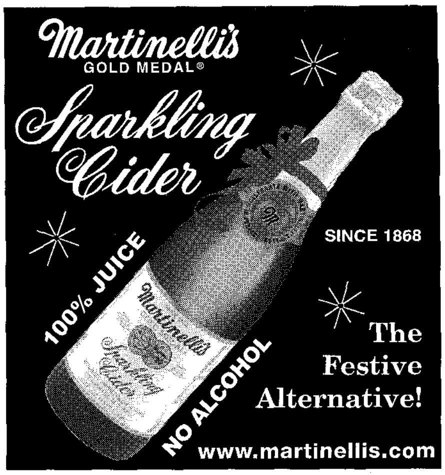
Parker often plays, and the change suits her. She isn't just doing a turn on a stereotype in this role; she's showing us a real, idiosyncratic person.

Nancy's coolness extends to lying to her children, fifteen-year-old Silas (Hunter Parrish) and his tween brother, Shane (Alexander Gould). When she is paged at an odd hour and has to leave the house, Shane asks where she's going, and she says, “It's a Neighborhood Watch thing.” Waiting for her in her car is Josh (Justin Chatwin), a smart-mouthed teenage dealer whose inventory was depleted by local moviegoers getting high for the midnight showing of “Winged Migration.” “Shit hasn't gone this fast since ‘The Passion of the Christ,’ ” he says. Everything that comes out of Josh's mouth is a sarcastic comment about the hypocrisy of adults generally—especially the ones who use dope—or of Nancy specifically, since she is dealing but, at the same time, ordering him not to sell to kids.

In the first five episodes of “Weeds” (the series, which is ten episodes long, began in early August and continues through mid-October), the show itself doesn't appear to be taking sides when it comes to the legality and morality of marijuana-dealing or possession or use, and it isn't, like Josh, preoccupied with hypocrisy, except in a comedic way. Viewers probably can't help feeling a little unsettled by Nancy's business, even though her intention is to turn the front she sets up with her accountant, Doug (the hilarious Kevin Nealon), who is also one of her best clients, into a legitimate enterprise. At the same time, it's funny to see how her entrepreneurial abilities flower under the pressure of competition—it's a shining example of American capitalism at work. In the third episode, Nancy kicks into a higher gear, and so does the show, when she discovers that there's a parallel universe of pot distribution out there—the shops that sprang up to dispense medical marijuana after the passage of California's Proposition 215, in 1996—and that it's taking customers away from her. When she checks out one of these emporiums, she's so impressed by the rich array of product that she calls the place “the Whole Foods of pot.” (The different varieties even have cutesy names; the Stephen Hawking, for example, is so strong that it will put you in a wheelchair.) To win back her customers, Nancy starts her own food line: doped-up popcorn balls, corn bread, brownies. It's a roaring success.

“Weeds” has something of the comic tone of “Arrested Development” when it comes to its attitude toward what makes this country hum (though that show, which is more freewheeling, actually takes a harder line on its subject, presenting the American dream as bankrupt), but it also works as a drama. Silas and Shane have to cope with the death of their father and its side effects—one bratty kid calls Shane “orphan boy,” and money is so tight that the Botwins' phone gets cut off. Myths about certain aspects of family life are busted, too: Nancy tells Doug that she can't let her housekeeper go because she's like family, but the housekeeper doesn't see it that way—she wants to be paid, and she wants to be paid on time. Celia, who, it turns out, is Nancy's friend despite her iciness in the show's first scene, is also going through hard times, some of which are funny and some of which are not. Celia bears an uncanny resemblance to Bree, the controlling perfectionist played by Marcia Cross in “Desperate Housewives.” She calls her chubby daughter Isabel “Isabelly,” and replaces the girl's secret stash of chocolate with an identical-looking laxative, which leads to a humiliating episode at school for Isabel. Celia's awful, but drolly so, and she's not unsympathetic.

It's really the acting that makes “Weeds,” particularly that of Parker and Perkins. They're terrific, separately and in their scenes together. They look a lot alike—they could easily play sisters—and the fact that their characters are so different reminds you how often actresses are called upon merely to live up to the stereotype of their looks. There is one shoddy aspect of “Weeds,” however, and that's the depiction of Nancy's supplier, Heylia (Tonye Patano), pronounced “*Hell* yeah”—a monotonously sassy black woman who is meant to be a tongue-in-cheek indictment of the way blacks are represented in pop culture. It makes you question Kohan's feel for her own material. But, for the most part, the sensibility on display here is an interesting combination of sober and antic. And there's no way you can dislike a show with a line like this: When Nancy calls Doug an idiot, he replies proudly, “I'm an idiot *savant*.” ♦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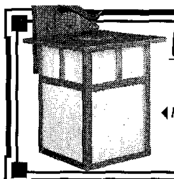
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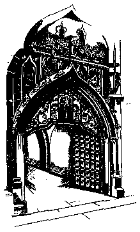
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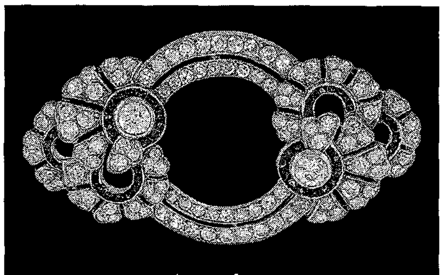
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THE ART WORLD

WHAT ON EARTH

A Robert Smithson retrospective.

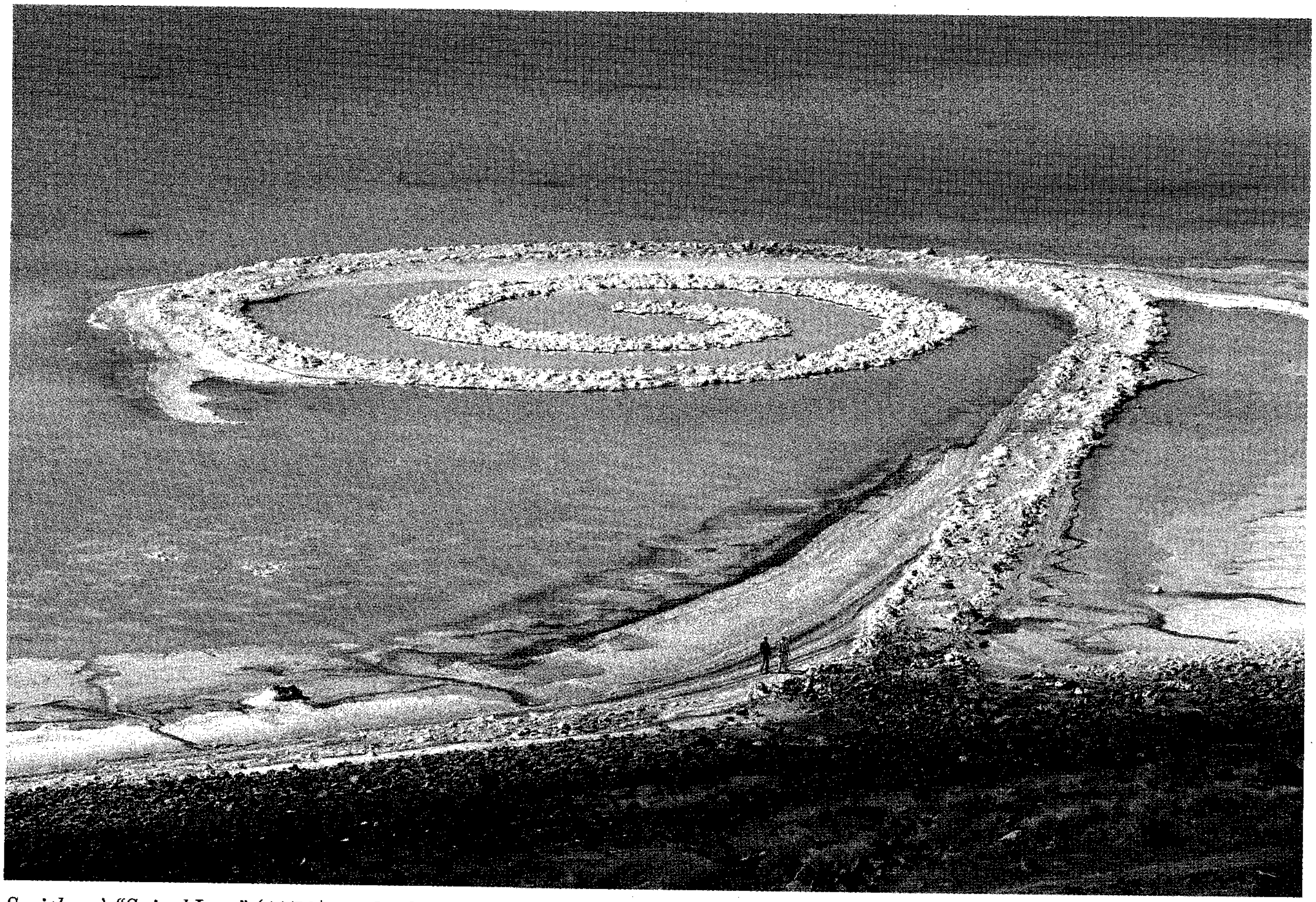
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Robert Smithson is in fashion, in a hair-shirt kind of way. Excited reverence has marked the art-world response to a retrospective of his work that opened in Los Angeles last year and is now at the Whitney. This may seem odd, given that Smithson, the mystagogical dandy of postminimalism, who died in a plane crash in 1973, at the age of thirty-five, was a sculptor who made exactly one good sculpture: "The Spiral Jetty" (1970), a coil of rocks and dirt made with earth-moving equipment, in a remote bay of the Great Salt Lake, which few people have seen except in handsome but inevitably misleading photographs. (Underwater for many years, it reëmerged in 2002.) I paid my own first visit recently, jolting over rudimentary dirt roads. The piece is initially disappointing: a rather dainty geometrical figure that, at about a hundred and fifty feet across, is too small—not by a lot, but fatally so—to hold scale against the sun-stunned, distantly islanded lake, amid hills that are strewn with black basalt boulders. (It is within sight of another, truly huge jetty, the site of long-derelict facilities that were once used for extracting oil from some still seeping, odorous tar pits. Smithson, who loved ruins, wrote about it in connection to his work, but, strangely, few others have taken it into account.) The "Jetty" improves dramatically when you tread its jagged surface, which is lapped by syrupy, clear water that is tinted pink by algae, and encrusted with formations of ice-white salt left over from the jetty's intermittent submersions. Out there, I felt mightily centered in the ambient desolation. In the course of an afternoon, I asked occasional fellow-tourists why they had come. All said that they had heard of the "Jetty" and reckoned that it was something to see—usually along with the nearby Golden Spike National Monument, where, periodically, old-timey locomotives reënact the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, in 1869. (People seemed puzzled when asked if they liked the work. One said, "It's O.K.")

As an artist, Smithson was a poet, at his best in critical, philosophical, and manifesto-like pieces that he wrote for *Artforum* and other magazines between 1966 and 1973. If his art is great—in the sense that great art, whatever else it does, nags at the minds of subsequent artists—it is so in ways that do not meet the eye but take form in cogitation. In visual mediums, Smithson was some combination of the congenitally talentless and the allergic to sensory enjoyment. I defy anyone to defend anything in the Whitney show as being satisfying to look at. It ranges from callow religious paintings, through gimmicky geometric sculptures (which are imitative of the minimalists, notably Sol LeWitt), to arid exhibits of rocks, mirrors, and whatnot that relate, like relics, to the artist's expeditions in various wastelands, along with documentary drawings, maps, and many, many photographs—the harvest of a barely fifteen-year career in which Smithson barged to the nerve center of the New York avant-garde. (I recall the nightly sight of him at Max's Kansas City, with his permanent smirk and his somehow physically palpable, daunting intelligence.) But his coldly impassioned, polymathic, torrential essays are objects of art that will outlive much of what hangs in modern museums.

The sculptor Carl Andre, a friend of Smithson's, called him "a trickster rogue . . . Transylvanian." He was born in 1938 and grew up in the New Jersey suburbs as an only child. (A brother had died of leukemia.) His pediatrician, in Rutherford, was the poet William Carlos Williams, whose rhapsodic treatment of geology in the epic "Paterson" would contribute to his ardor for earth sciences. Obsessed with dinosaurs as a boy, Smithson often visited the Museum of Natural History in New York with his father, a mortgage-and-loan officer, who built a room in their basement for Robert's collected fossils and live snakes, and encouraged him to plan the family's vacations to national parks. At the age of sixteen, Smithson was dividing his days between public high school and, on a scholarship, the Art Students League, in New York. He never attended college. He met artists and writers—among them Franz Kline, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Hubert Selby, Jr., who became a particular friend—at the Cedar Bar and in Village coffeehouses. He hitchhiked across the United States and Mexico. He had a solo show in New York in 1959, when he was twenty-one, and another two years later, in Rome.

A driven autodidact, Smithson became enthralled by the anguished Anglo-Catholicism of T. S. Eliot and the dashing misanthropy of Wyndham Lewis—members, along with Ezra Pound and T. E. Hulme, of what Smithson, deprecating this phase of his development years later, called "the antidemocratic intelligentsia." They fed an attitude in him of showy suffering and superb disdain. Was Smithson a trifle full of himself? He wrote to a patron in Rome, in 1961, apropos paintings in which he identified with Christ crucified, "I am a Modern artist dying of Modernism," and, of New York, "I don't have to appeal to the art world here; they will follow." He wasn't far wrong—given that, by the mid-sixties, in New York, almost any radical gesture could gin up a constituency. He was the firstcomer of the postminimalist generation, which grounded itself in a cultural situation revolutionized by minimalism and Pop art—a violently expanded milieu, immediately seductive to academic intellectuals, in which critical attention and institutional backing tended to favor every latest thing, the farther out the better. As a maker of art, Smithson was no match for the three other leading postminimalists—Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, and Eva Hesse, who let their work speak for them. He surfed ideas. The most potent was the ostensibly anti-commercial, anti-museum argosy of "earthworks," a species of instant monuments on pharaonic scale in far-flung places, which he conceived in 1966, when he was an "artist consultant" to engineers working on the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport. Those projects included "Partially Buried Woodshed" (1970), in Kent, Ohio, and "Broken Circle" and "Spiral Hill," both from 1971, in Emmen, Holland. (Among other lately reglamorized classics of the movement are monumental interventions by Michael Heizer in Nevada and Walter de Maria in New Mexico.) Smithson gave earthworks a grounding in history and theory with a brilliant essay on the auteur of Central Park, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape" (1973). By the time he died, his thinking had taken a tentatively civic turn, as in proposing the redemption of played-out strip mines as art.


Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" (1970), in the Great Salt Lake, Utah, has been underwater for most of the past thirty years.

TOM SMART

"In the illusory babels of language,"

he wrote in 1968, "an artist might advance specifically to get lost, and to intoxicate himself in dizzying syntaxes, seeking odd intersections of meaning, strange corridors of history, unexpected echoes, unknown humors, or voids of knowledge . . . coherences that vanish into quasiexactitudes and sublunary and translunary principles." The passage typifies Smithson's practically hallucinogenic prose style, whose content seems to me at least as much a matter of how it sounds as of what, often with sly opacity, it says. I think of Smithson as the last and, but for Ginsberg, perhaps the best Beat poet. His finest work, for me, along with a richly suggestive film about the making of the "Jetty," is his essay "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967), which, teasing significance from such things as a pumping derrick, drainpipes, and a sandbox, strums the sublime: "Time turns metaphors into *things*, and stacks them up in cold rooms, or places them in the celestial playgrounds of the suburbs." Toward the end of the piece, he asks, "Has Passaic replaced Rome as The Eternal City?," and, by that point, you are fairly prepared to believe it.

As a figure of freedom, temerity, and lyrical prophecy, Smithson stirs nostalgia among artists and others in the art world, which, for all its wealth and popularity, feels increasingly constricted, faltering, and prosaic. That nostalgia is like a yearning for a lost frontier, troubling the sleep of careworn suburbanites. Smithson's example suggests not only that anything can be art but that anyone, with proper fire in the belly, can become a great artist, even without being much good at it. This fit of romance won't last. It will count again that the works that are on display at the Whitney are drab and tedious. But, for a while, thoughts of Smithson will continue to fuel a present, perhaps eventually fruitful, mood of burning dissatisfaction. ♦

OOPS DEPARTMENT

From the Times.

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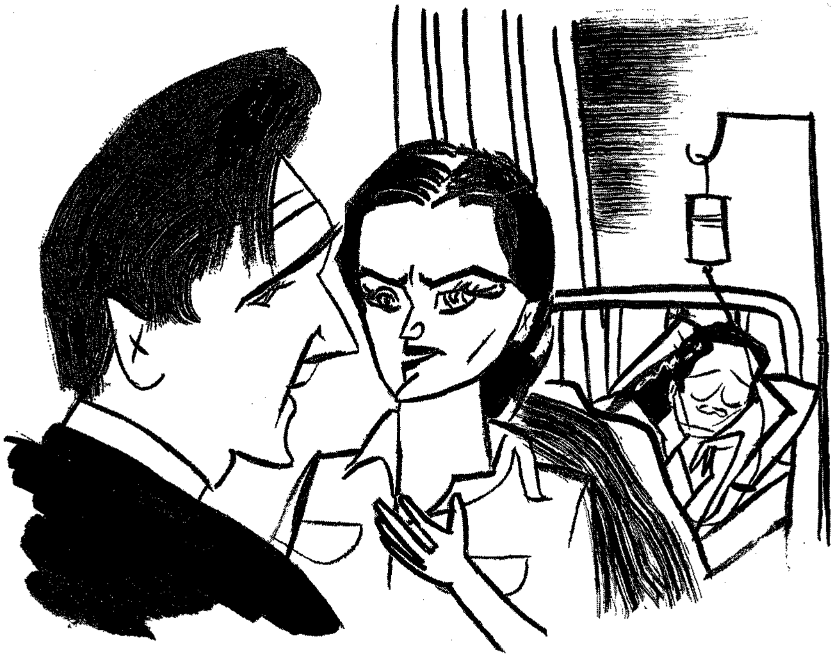
THE CURRENT CINEMA

OFFICERS AND GENTLEMEN

"The Constant Gardener."

BY ANTHONY LANE

As if to warn that we are entering a disorderly world, "The Constant Gardener" starts with a farewell. Justin Quayle (Ralph Fiennes) waves goodbye to his wife, Tessa (Rachel Weisz), as she heads toward a plane. She is accompanied by their friend Dr. Bluhm (Hubert Koundé)—better known as Arnold—who shoulders her bag as they go. The screen turns white, as though invaded by ghosts, and Justin never sees his wife alive again. The rest of Fernando Meirelles's film, shuttling around in time, continents, and mood, tells us who these people are, examines the ties that bind them, and ponders the death not just of Tessa but of Arnold, too, and those of several million others.



Ralph Fiennes and Rachel Weisz, in the movie adapted from the John le Carré novel.

TOM BACHTELL

The bulk of the story is set in Africa. If you read the John le Carré novel from which the film is adapted, you are instantly and specifically made aware that this is a Kenyan story, but the film seems diffuse on the matter, and many viewers leaving the theatre will struggle to name the location. Meirelles wants to tell an all-Africa tale of woe: a noble but dangerous plan, which threatens to turn an entire landmass into one big problem. That said, the visions conjured here have a savor and a bite that feel anything but blurred. From the early shots of rust-colored salt pans, viewed from above as though from a planetary probe, to the handheld plunges into an urban throng, "The Constant Gardener" offers a fervid rebuke to the Western, nose-holding stance that extracts what prettiness it can from the landscape and leaves the rest to rot. After this film, nobody could rent a DVD of "Out of Africa" with a clear conscience. Whatever ails the place, it was never going to be cured by Robert Redford's jodhpurs.

Justin is a British diplomat, based at the High Commission. Tessa is his new bride, and she is roughly as diplomatic as a punch in the kidneys. We see their first meeting, back in London, where she rises to her feet after a lecture, delivered by Justin, and launches into a formless, flaming rant about Iraq. After

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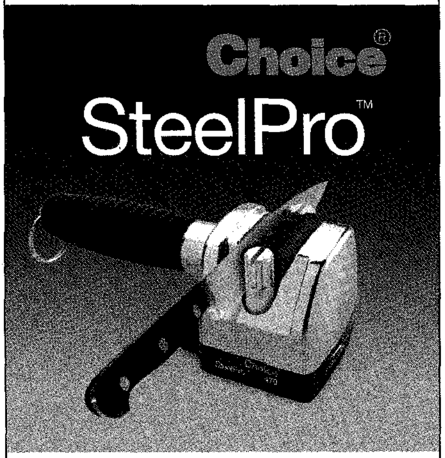

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which, needless to say, he has no option but to sleep with her; you can't walk away from flames like that. Whereupon she tracks him down at work—since when did politically volatile brunettes waft through security at the Foreign Office?—and demands to go with him to Africa. "We hardly know one another," he protests. "You can learn me," she says, with a half smile that fells poor Justin like a sapling. Tessa is an education; the problem, for Justin, is that by the time she dies—murdered by persons unknown on the shores of a forsaken lake—he is barely into his first lesson.

And the problem for Meirelles is that so headlong is his need to keep pace with the characters, and with the gallop of their feelings, that he forgets to pause and remind us of what they actually do. Justin's job is spectacularly ill-defined—something to do with development, though we never witness him develop anything but guilt and ire. As for Tessa (an impossible role, two parts Naomi Klein to three parts Sophia Loren), for whom does she work? She initially appears to be a journalist. Then she marches through slum areas with the purposeful gait of a charity worker. But her true calling is a crusade against the pharmaceutical companies and their snaky ways. In which case, why is her report on their malpractice sent through official channels rather than openly published? Does she work in parallel with Justin, or in furtive league against him?

The fact that none of the above is satisfactorily answered, and that we nevertheless emerge from the movie feeling nourished and stirred, is a tribute to Meirelles and, of course, to le Carré. He more or less invented the idea that any person—spy or otherwise—will, under inspection, turn out to be not so much a solid body as a dance of the seven veils. Whip one veil away, and, while you congratulate yourself on arriving at reliable evidence, up floats the next. For instance, there is nothing in the plot of "The Constant Gardener" to verify that Tessa is a mole, that she could have laid down her life in order to infiltrate Justin's and, in so doing, burrow close to the heart of capitalist darkness. Yet the possibility that she *might* have done so, and that her doting love is thus a ruse, glimmers through every twist.

The glimmer extends to Arnold, who travelled up-country with Tessa and is now missing; the assumption, at the High Commission, is that he was both her lover and her killer. (This being le Carré, assumptions crumble like soil.) The task of breaking the news of that double blow to Justin falls to his friend Sandy (Danny Huston), who runs the political section. Together they identify Tessa's body; both men loved her, but only one of them possessed her—Sandy, in short, has secrets of his own, and we pursue those secrets up the chain of command, all the way to Sir Bernard Pellegrin (Bill Nighy), who oversees British representation in Africa from the distant aerie of London. Justin is summoned there, and, as his passport is politely confiscated at a British airport, we sense the claws of conspiracy start to grip.

What ensues is a chase, as our reluctant hero maps the path laid down by his late wife. "We can't involve ourselves in their lives, Tess," he once told her, as they were jostled by the suffering of Africans. She scorned such boneless diffidence, and, with her death, he is forced to shed it—to learn her all over again. He snaffles a fake passport and skips to Berlin, then flies back to Africa to confront his fate. Such tenacity does not come easily to Justin, for he is by temperament one of those bruisable souls who lack the nerve—and, until now, sufficient reason—to strike out for themselves. At one point, he is questioned by Kenyan police. "For a diplomat, you are not a very good liar," one of them says. "I haven't risen very high," he responds. There is a dash of amused apology in those words, and they indicate that Ralph Fiennes is back on firm ground. "The Constant Gardener" returns him to the line of inquiry that he dropped after "The English Patient" and that he alone, these days, seems qualified to pursue: What happens to a gentleman when gentility is no longer enough?

It is hardly a fashionable question. To most moviegoers, it must seem as archaic and parochial as a Victorian novel, and there is little doubt that "The Constant Gardener" will be an easier sell in Europe, fettered to Africa by a fraught colonial past, than it will here. Yet the cracking of decorum is a crisis that knows no boundaries; it happens every time somebody gets drunk at a wedding, or traps a politician on the hook. To see the cracks appear in Fiennes is, at first, a matter of near-farce. Who but a Brit would usher a woman into her house with the words "You lead the way," as if they were visiting a stately home instead of going to bed? Who else would fuss over his beloved plants (hence the title), tending them like children? Yet Fiennes isn't funny for long, because, as with Michael Redgrave, you are left with that discomforting blend of the intense and the restless—the blue eyes that bore into you and then glance away, seeking another target. That is why foreign settings suit him as an actor; in his own country, he seems unhappy and adrift. There is nothing more touching in "The Constant Gardener" than the gravity with which he bends to shake hands with a small Kenyan boy and thank him for attending Tessa's funeral. There is no condescension here; it is a mark of the gentleman, if the species still exists, that he should treat a child exactly as he would Sir Bernard Pellegrin, and vice versa. The lesson of the movie, indeed, is that only one of them deserves the compliment.

Better still, the boy is a pivot in the plot. He leads Justin toward a project called Three Bees, which is testing a treatment for tuberculosis. That sounds useful, except that the guinea pigs don't know that they are being used. Many will die of AIDS, which means that any injurious side effects can be concealed. Le Carré claims that his plot is a pale understatement of true pharmaceutical knavery, and I believe him. The movie fails to explain, however, why any company would race to beat the market with a new drug if it knew that drug to be flawed. Would its share price not drop once the flaw became clear, trashing the very profits that le Carré perceives to be the fount of Western wickedness in Africa? His books, far from mellowing, have grown more abrasive, and "The Constant Gardener" is one of the angriest. What remains onscreen, however, once his wry, raised-eyebrow storytelling falls away, is a kind of writhing exasperation, and by the end Meirelles's film strikes you as too busy and bullish for its own good. The spice-warm, supersaturated colors that so beguiled the eye in the first hour come to clog the screen, and from the relentless chop of the editing you would never guess that Africa has experienced a moment's stillness (or a day's good news). Given that Meirelles's last film was the exhausting "City of God," shot in his native Brazil, this is unsurprising, and one could argue that the new movie is doing no more than honoring the change in Justin, and his panicky rush into principle. Don't get me wrong: "The Constant Gardener" is a meatier proposition than most of the summer releases, and its curiosity toward the world is rare and unflagging. Think about it a day later, though, and its hectic swoop from romance to thriller to campaign manifesto leaves oddly little afterglow. The gardener is the only constant here; so much else burns up and blows away. ♦

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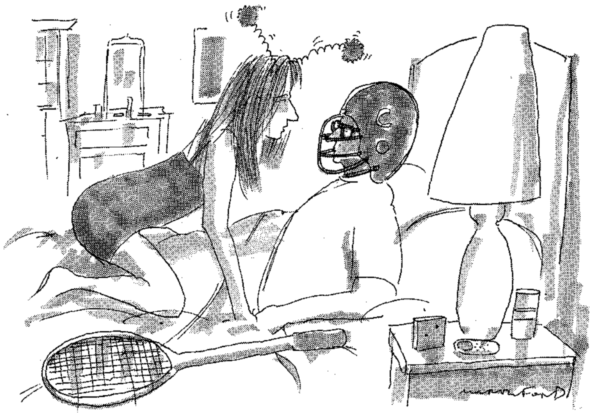
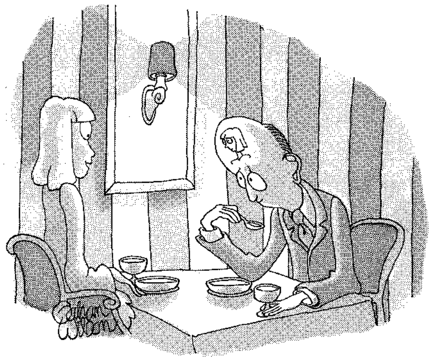
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Robert Weber, must be received by Sunday, September 4th. Finalists in the August 22nd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 19th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"This is why I love yard sales."
Scott Fitzpatrick, Westfield, N.J.



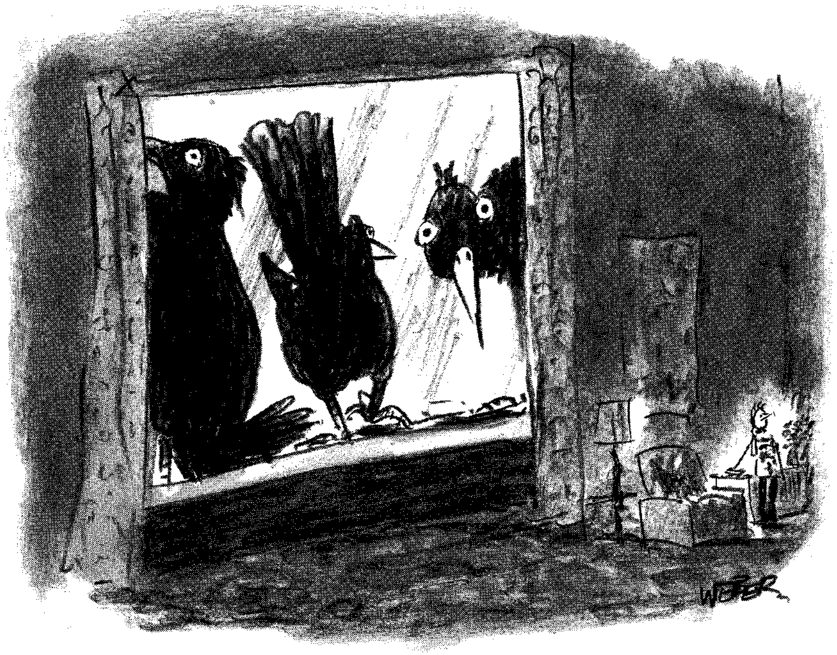
THE FINALISTS

"Don't move. I think I have something in my teeth."
Kim Corbin, Grosse Pointe Park, Mich.

"It may look like the Virgin Mary, but I don't see how you can sell it on eBay."
Paul Pritchard, Piedmont, Calif.

"Well, it's a lovely gesture, but I still think we should start seeing other people."
Evan Butterfield, Chicago, Ill.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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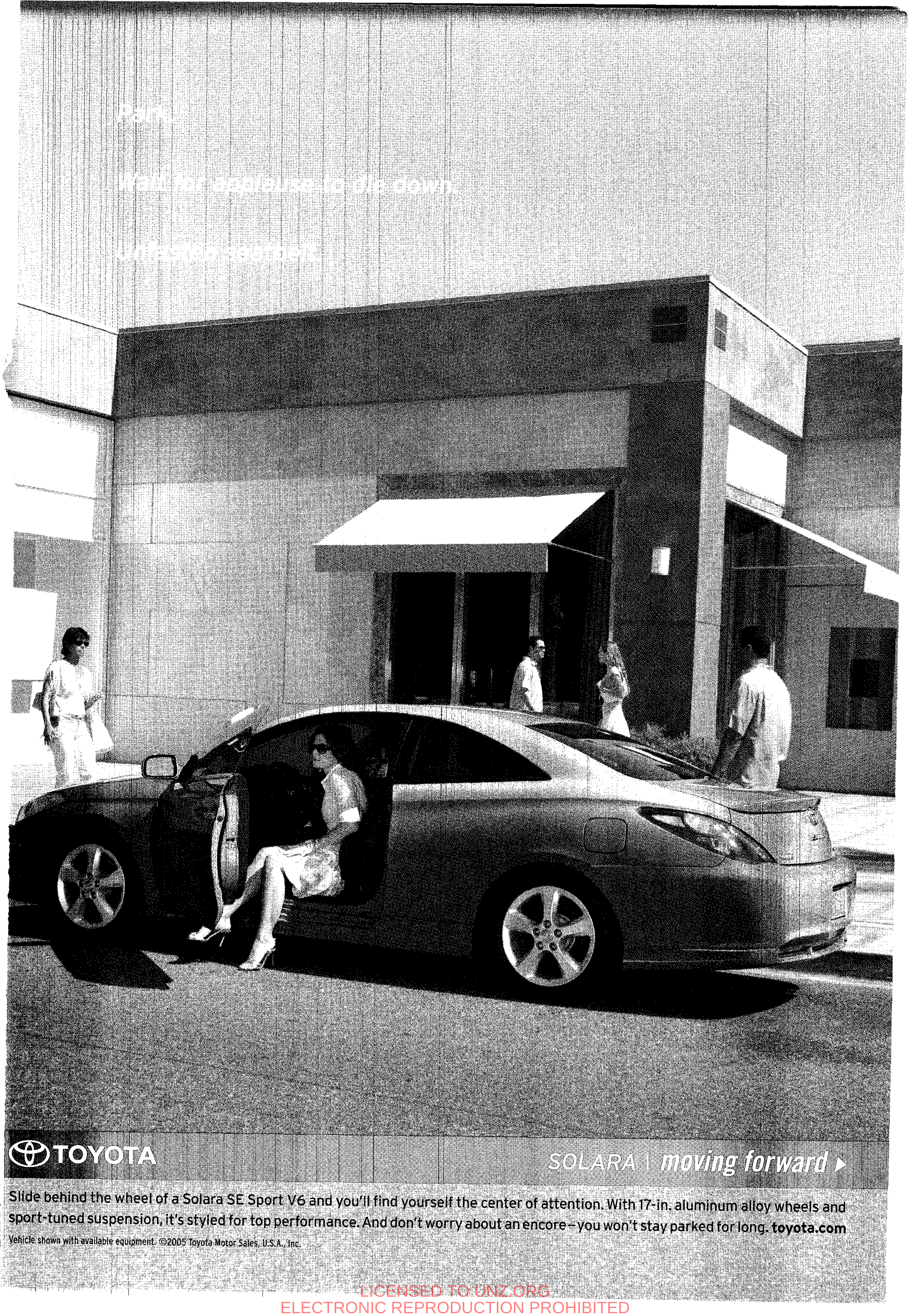
Park.
Wait for applause to die down.
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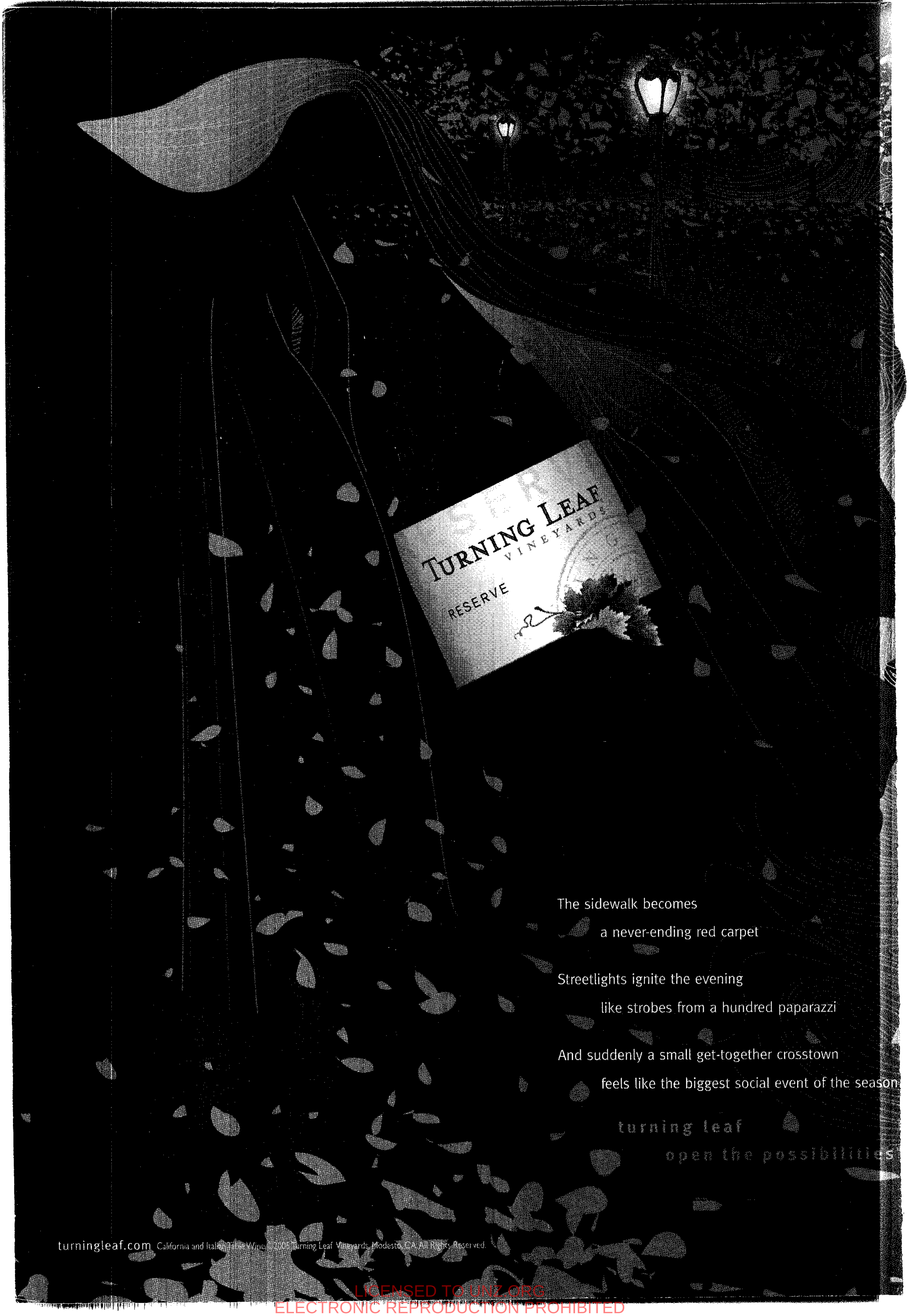

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like strobes from a hundred paparazzi

And suddenly a small get-together crosstown
feels like the biggest social event of the season

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